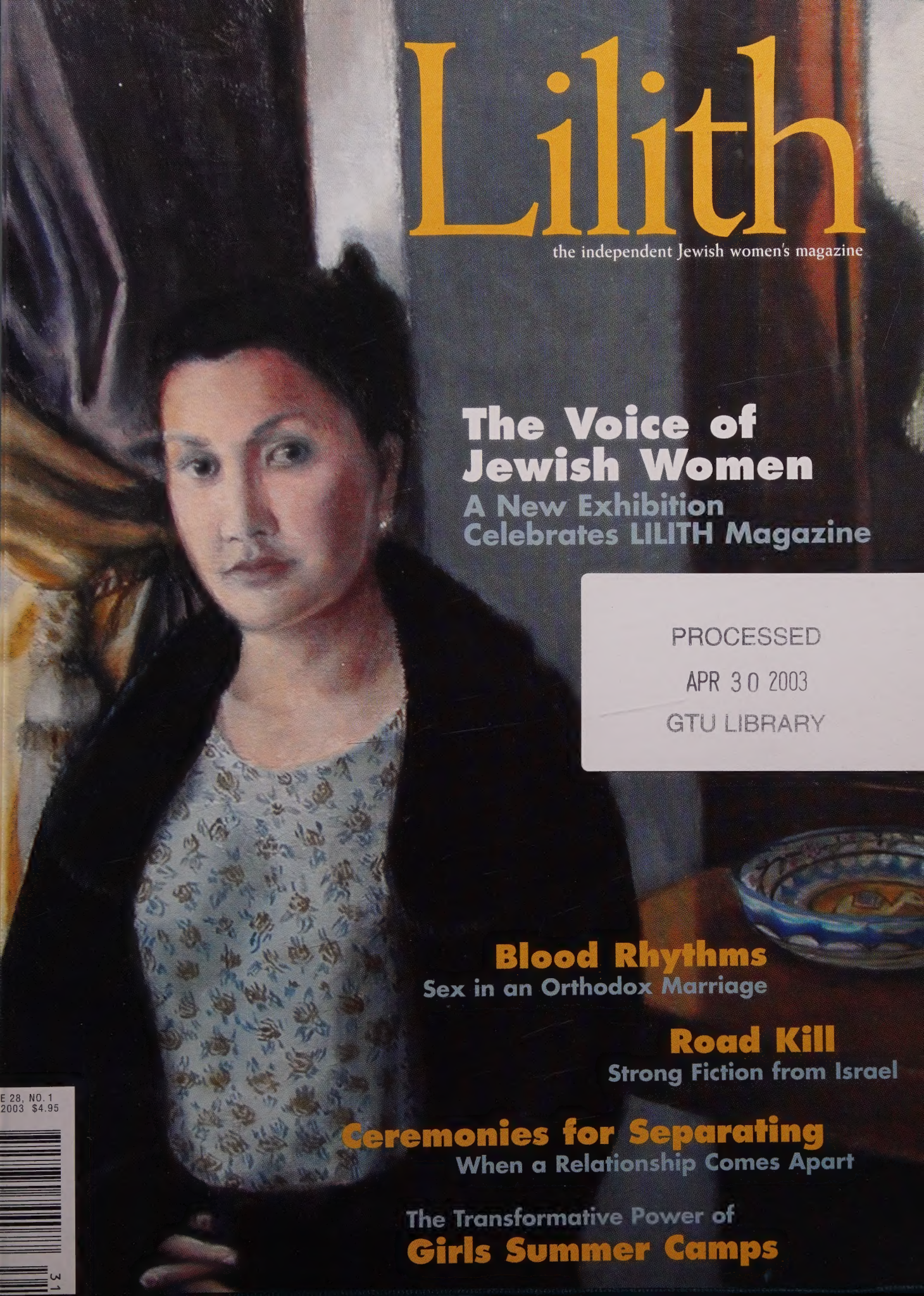

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the independent Jewish women's magazine

The Voice of Jewish Women

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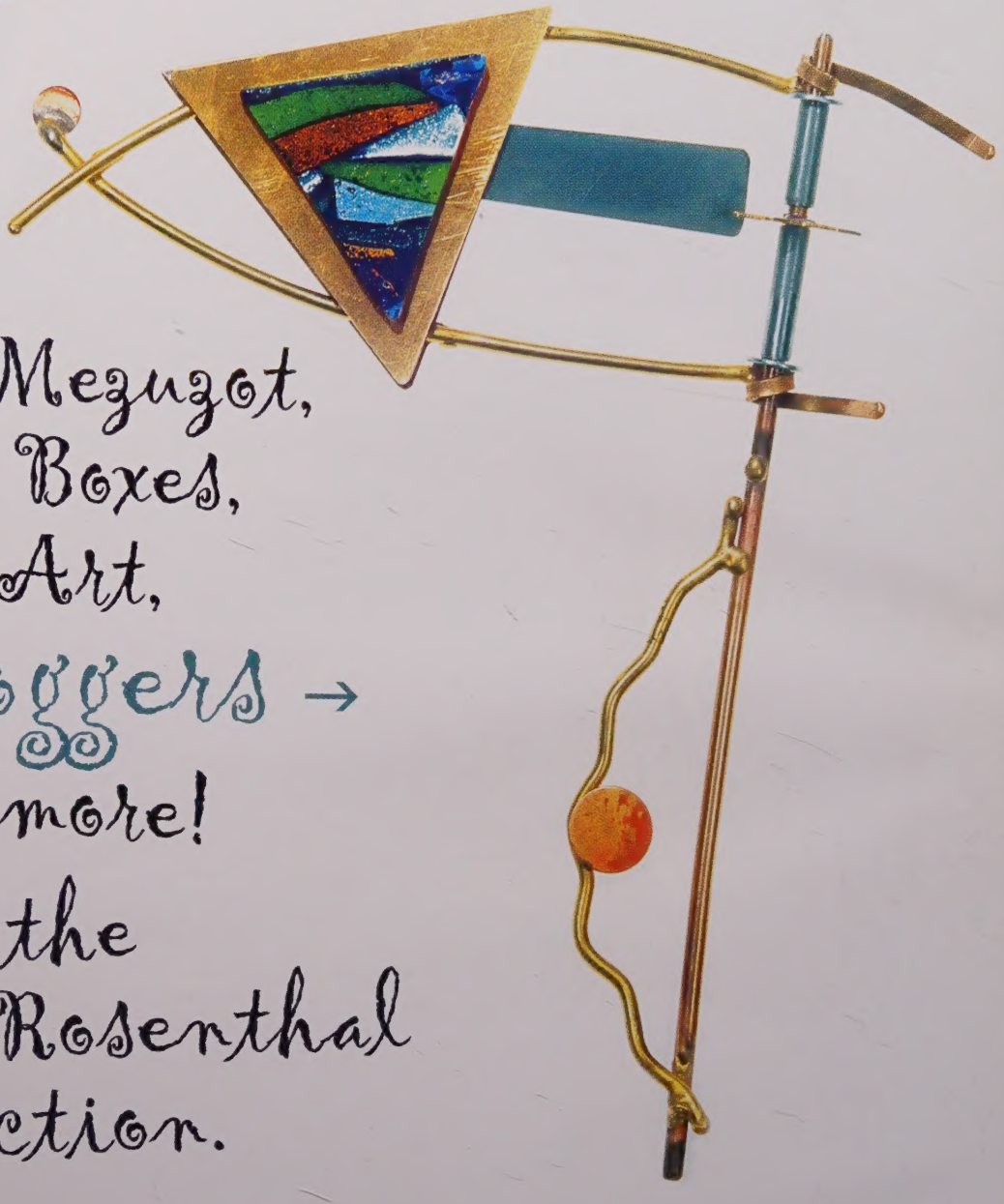

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Lilith

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Why is this magazine called Lilith?

In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."

—FROM *THE ALPHABET OF BEN SIRA*, 23A-B

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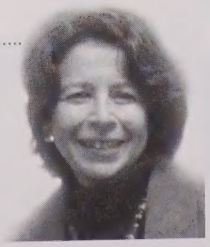
From the Editor



It's so complicated, isn't it, how we relate to one another in our committed relationships. And much more complicated when there's an overlay—or an underpinning—of religious law and tradition binding you to someone you love. Or, in some cases, cease to love.

I was led to think about these, our closest chosen relationships, as I read through the dozens and dozens of issues of LILITH published since the first one came out in 1976. From the illustration on the cover of that premier issue, it looks like we expected each Jewish woman to be all things to all people—fertile mother, chicken-soup-bearing household goddess, practicing physician, religious scholar, pious worshipper, culture icon. Talk about role diffusion!

Well, the professional part is in place—just read in this issue about the experiences of Shala Erlich, the young medical doctor of "Frontier Bris." But those interpersonal relationships, especially (dare I speak the word) love relationships, are still an arena for complexity. This season alone our office received review copies of 10 books about contemporary marriage and how to negotiate its shoals. In the Jewish world, where demographics reinforce the anecdotal evidence that Jews are marrying later if at all, marriage seems especially fraught. We limn some of the reasons on a wall panel entitled "Rethinking Our Relationships" at a new LILITH exhibit at Hebrew Union College in New York which will travel to other cities in coming seasons.

To help create the exhibition, a 25-plus years retrospective celebration of "LILITH Magazine: The Voice of Jewish Women," I closed myself in my office and had the deep pleasure of immersing myself in those back issues of the magazine. It's amazing how many of the stories have legs—and not just in ahead-of the-curve reporting. (For instance, when the Reform movement decided this month to admit a female-to-male transgender student to its rabbinical school, LILITH readers had some background on the situation thanks to our cover story last year on transgender Jews.) In fact, among the most powerful LILITH stories are empathic, first-person accounts of Jewish women's lives—questioning, bold, anxious, creative, scholarly.

Testifying to the staying power of such forthright pieces—groundbreaking or heartbreaking or heroic, and sometimes all three—we've decided to reprint, from time to time, these useful gems. In this issue, the subject is divorce. Traditional Jewish law on divorce looks to us, in modern times, to work exclusively against the rights of women. Only a man can institute divorce proceedings, an asymmetry that gives some husbands license to delay or deny the *get*, the Jewish divorce document. While there are now women and men seeking halakhic ways to modify or reinterpret this male-empowering law, two LILITH authors, one a rabbi and the other a therapist, use the moment of marital dissolution for accessing Jewish sources in remarkable and comforting ways. Independently, they re-fit familiar Jewish rituals, and create new ones, to assign a different valence to the chemistry of ending a Jewish marriage.

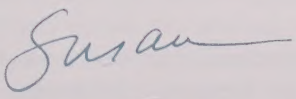
Marital relations play an inriguing role in another article here as well. C. Devora Hammer, who was last in LILITH's pages as the "Stay-at-Work Mom" [Fall 2002], tells some well-kept secrets about sexuality in a contemporary Orthodox marriage where the partners, who are people of their times in many other ways, hold firm to the religious strictures that mandate complete physical separation of a wife and her husband for half of every month. While the divorce experiences in this issue show how the flexibility of Jewish ritual and tradition works for those who want to rework them from a feminist perspective, Hammer tells how she came to the view that traditional Jewish laws about sex give women great power.

All these narratives derive their power from being positioned where personal experience intersects with Jewish law and custom. And as I discovered when I read through those tantalizing back issues, the same holds for many other articles LILITH has published in the magazine's almost chai-and-a half years. The exhibition, which you can preview here beginning on page 19, journeys thorough the most compelling concerns of Jewish women since the inception of the women's movement in the 1970s. But the show is far more than a historical retrospective, though we do have enough history at the magazine to take a long view of Jewish women's stunning accomplishments. The themes that emerged come to viewers in 10 remarkable wall panels (and there could have been 30), designed gorgeously by LILITH Art Director Laurie Douglas. We've tried to suggest the complex richness of women's explo-

rations by highlighting on each panel the reporting and fiction and memoirs that have both spurred and reflected the flowering of women's participation in (and reshaping of) contemporary Jewish life. Each theme also leads us into the future, and each panel (including the ones you see reproduced here in the magazine) asks its viewers to move the subject forward.

I hope you'll do two things after sampling the panels we bring you here. One is to answer the questions the panels pose (send your answers to Lilithmag@aol.com or fax (212) 757-5705), so that we can share them with other readers in an upcoming issue. And, two: think about where in your own community this exhibition should be on display: JCCs? A college campus? The Jewish museum or cultural center? A Jewish day school? A women's building? Beginning in the summer of 2003, the exhibition is ready to travel. Become a partner in this venture by using the exhibition to showcase local Jewish women's talent in readings or gallery shows or performances connected to the exhibition. We'll help. Just call or write. And visit LILITH's newly refreshed website: www.Lilith.org

In this world of uncertainty, the exhibition gives us all a chance to consolidate the gains of the past few decades and to think creatively about the future we want to build as Jews and as women.



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LILITH
250 West 57th Street, #2432
New York, NY 10107
phone: (212) 757-0818
fax: (212) 757-5705
lilithmag@aol.com
www.lilithmag.com

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Kol Ishah:
The Voices of Women.

Traditionally, the **voice** of the Jewish woman was **not to be heard** in public, lest it arouse men. **No more.** These pages are for news about Jewish women, **in our own strong voices.**

That's Exactly What We've Been Saying All These Years!

Altruism, argues an Israeli sociologist, is strongly gender-related. And guess *which* gender? In her new book, *The Altruistic Dialogue* (in Hebrew, Pardess Publishing House), **Sara Shalev** says that the urge to help others forms the basis of women's ethics. But not men's. Her conclusion: if our male-dominated society would only incorporate more of women's values, we'd all live in a much better world.

Bush's War—the One on Women

One of the first acts of **George W. Bush** as President was to bar health organizations abroad that receive U.S. aid from offering any abortion services. Today, the threats to women's reproductive freedom are reaching alarming levels. From the President's passionate vow in his State of the Union address to sign a so-called "partial birth" abortion bill, to the appointment of anti-choice, abstinence-only crusaders to government agencies and the federal courts, the Bush Administration, in a nod to the religious right, is using every angle it can think of to block women's access to safe and affordable reproductive health care. One example is the naming of **W. David Hager** to the Food and Drug Administration's Advisory Committee for Reproductive Health Drugs, part of the Christian Medical Association's failed campaign against the FDA's approval of RU-486, or "the morning-after pill." Another is the appointment of **Tom Coburn** to the president's Advisory Council on HIV and AIDS. Former Representative Coburn of Oklahoma opposes the use of condoms to prevent AIDS. This relentless campaign took a particularly cynical turn when The National Cancer Institute replaced a statement on its Web site that the most recent studies found no association between breast cancer and abortion with another clearly designed to strike fear into the hearts of women who have had abortions. The National Institute of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have deleted information about the effectiveness of condoms from their websites, as well as information about a sex information curriculum.

Jewish women's organizations are taking action. In Washington, Hadassah's "action office" director **Marla Gilson** stays in touch with members of Congress, and sends out "action alert" newsletters to Hadassah members. Should a "partial birth abortion" bill come up, said **Shelley Klein**, director of Hadassah's American Affairs/Domestic Policy division, Hadassah will lobby hard against it.

The National Council of Jewish Women also will be educating and mobilizing at the grassroots level, said **Sammie Moshenberg**, director of Washington operations for the organization. NCJW is, she said, currently educating rabbis about Bush's judicial nominees. Last year, they launched a "Benchmark" campaign to lobby senators to vote against federal judicial nominees who do not support choice.

"We're really concerned about how politics and, in some cases, religious ideology have been inserted into the issue of health care services," said Moshenberg."As women, we have a stake in all of these issues. As Jewish women, we're especially concerned, because in a lot of instances this policy is designed to promote one religious point of view above others." *www. Hadassah.org; www.ncjw.org* — ALICE SPARBERG ALEXIOU

Food and Loathing

LINDY HESS

Betsy Lerner recently spoke to LILITH news editor Alice Sparberg Alexiou about her recently-published *Food and Loathing: A Lament* (Simon & Schuster, $22), about her struggle with compulsive overeating disorder.

LILITH: What made you tell your story?

Lerner: I tried to suppress it for years. I tried to write it as a novel....I remember the day I was inspired to finally start it. I was on a train coming from Provence with my husband. I hadn't brought a notebook along. I think that liberated me. We'd overeaten on this trip, and my husband and I were joking that we'd start a diet "on Monday." I asked my husband for a sheet of paper. I began to write.

The truth is, I've always wanted to tell my story. I've always been picking up the carpet to show the dirt. But I never calculated this.

LILITH: You give the reader a lot of painful details, such as the death of your two-year-old sister when you were very young, your thoughts of suicide and subsequent hospitalization,

all of which help to tell your story. Your book is about a lot of things—not only your struggle with mental illness, but also about families, and grief. Can you address that?

Lerner: My sister's death went largely unmourned. My parents did the best they could; they stayed together. But there were no grief counselors running around then. I never felt safe. I had to take care of myself.

LILITH: Some might find your portrayal of your parents quite brutal.

Lerner: *[laughing]* I thought I was kind of generous! My mom is shocked, but also supportive. She's making me a book party. She knows it's important to me; she set me up to be a writer. But it's definitely hard for her.

LILITH: One of the psychiatrists you describe in your book refused to take your compulsive overeating seriously, even when you were suicidal. Is this a cautionary tale?

Lerner: When you're in need of treatment is when you are the most vulnerable. This doctor was a major father figure to me. I was in his thrall. I wanted to believe his version, that I was a phony.

LILITH: You talk about how much you hated your body when you were a teenager. Is there a Jewish angle to this obsession with body image?

Lerner: Definitely! Jewish families are a lot about food; a lot of love is handed out in the form of kugel. There was a lot of obesity in my family. And I certainly felt that food was love. When I was little my father and I used to go to the movies and binge together.

I was a chubby Jewish girl from the suburbs. No matter what I accomplished, that was all I was. I was deeply ashamed. Suburban equaled small-minded, chubby equaled not beautiful. And Jewish meant superstitious and ethnic, not glamorous. I was never happy about being Jewish. Yet I was drawn to Jewish writers. I love Cynthia Ozick, Philip Roth, Woody Allen.

LILITH: Are you still conflicted by your Jewishness?

Lerner: Yes. I'm intermarried, I left the suburbs. My husband and I are not raising our daughter, who's five, Jewish. But when my parents die, I know I'll sit shiva.

Oh, and I'm still chubby. And still Jewish. —A.S.A.

Combatting Violence Against Teen Girls

The Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago has awarded a grant to Response Center, which provides counseling and medical services related to adolescent sexuality. JWFC has been supporting the centers, both of which serve both Jewish and non-Jewish clienteles, since 1999, after learning from Response Center staff that fully one third of teens coming in for medical exams were reporting that they had been sexually assaulted, or were engaging in dangerous sexual activity. Center employees now report that the proportion of girls reporting such behavior has risen to one half.

"By 'sexual assault,' we are talking not just about rape," said **Laura Kaufman**, executive director of the foundation. Other forms, she said, include coerced oral sex.

"Girls 14, 15 years old are engaging in a lot of oral sex," said Kaufman. "It seems they're so bombarded by peer pressure that they'll do anything. I'm baffled that girls are so desperate to be accepted by peers, and by boys. They don't feel empowered to say, why am I doing this? Do I really want this?"

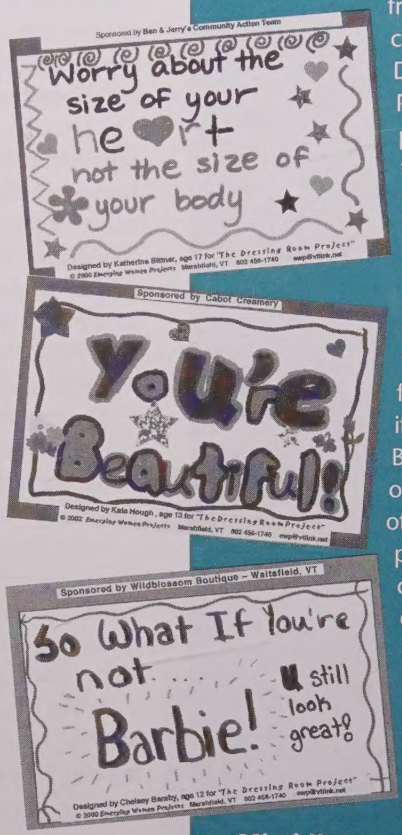
"We're adults," said Kaufman. "It's our job to help them, to tell them, you don't have to do this!" Part of the grant will go towards groups on safe dating and healthy relationships, a teen advisory board on programs, and groups for sexual abuse survivors.

—A.S.A.

kol ishah

"You Are Beautiful" —Yes, Even in the Dressing Room

Teen activists in Vermont are trying their hardest to increase self-esteem in the dreaded dressing room, a place where insecurities are normally flung about as freely as ill-fitting clothes. At the Dressing Room Project workshops, participants design funky, colorful cards with such slogans as "Worry about the size of your heart, not your body," "You are beautiful," and "So what if you're not a Barbie!" Hundreds of girls and women of all ages are now posting these cards in stores and on those revealing dressing room mirrors.


Sponsored by Ben & Jerry's Community Action Team
Worry about the size of your heart not the size of your body
Designed by Katherine Bittner, age 17 for "The Dressing Room Project"
Sponsored by Cabot Creamery
You're Beautiful!
Designed by Kate Hough, age 13 for "The Dressing Room Project"
Sponsored by Wildblossom Boutique – Waitsfield, VT
So What If You're not ... Barbie!
I still look great!
Designed by Chelsey Barsby, age 12 for "The Dressing Room Project"

The force behind this project is feminist/activist **Mimi Kates**, who describes the opposing pressures of the "Jewish girl scene" in Philadelphia, where she grew up, focused on clothing and appearance, and her own Jewish family in which education was a core value. The sweetly subversive body-image cards are part of Kates's Emerging Women Project, an organizations she founded in January 2000.

For information, and to purchase Dressing Room Project magnets (a sales innovation of 15-year-old EWP "marketing consultant" **Sophie Bielenberg**), contact Mimi Kates at *ewp@vtlink.net*.

—DAHLIA WISNER

kol ishah

Outing Violence

Shalom Bayit, a new program at New York University's social work school, focuses on the treatment and prevention of domestic violence specifically in the Jewish community.

Director **Linda Mills**, a vice provost and professor of social work at NYU, says that Jewish battered women stay in abusive relationships four to eight years longer than other women. Research shows that 50% of all women return to the men who abuse them. But among Orthodox women, said Mills, the figure is 95%.

"As much as it makes us angry, that's the reality," said Mills. "We need to work with these women in a nonjudgmental way." A clinician working with an abused Orthodox woman, Mills said, might begin by asking questions about her husband, and her commitment to her family.

"In other words," said Mills, "we speak to her from her point of view."

Women Bonding on and off Campus

Celebrated each month at the new moon, the feminine ties to Rosh Chodesh come from a *midrash*, originating almost 1500 years ago. It says that as a reward for not contributing their jewelry to the creation of the Golden Calf, God gave this holiday to women.

Nowadays most Jews think of Rosh Chodesh simply as a minor holiday where a blessing is recited in synagogue. The only problem is that until the twentieth century the only people allowed to pray aloud in synagogues were men, thus taking women's right to celebrate the new month away from them.

This pattern has changed as women formed their own Rosh Chodesh groups. One such group in Los Angeles, Westside Women, consists of female students from UCLA and the nearby conservative Sinai Temple. The goal of the program is to provide middle school and high school girls, whose ages range from 13 to 16, with strong successful female role models.

"The UCLA and Sinai program is wonderful and fun. Every time we meet it is a great experience where we learn something new by spending time with each other as a young Jewish women's group. And not to forget, we have a blast every time!" says Sinai High student **Ramona Saviss**.

Together the Westside Women celebrate Rosh Chodesh at Sinai Temple, talking about the new month and sharing moments from the previous month. Each Sinai student has been paired up with a "big sister" from UCLA. **Donna Pouladian**, a UCLA junior, says, "It feels wonderful to be a 'big sister' to the young girls in the program. I see that they enjoy the program as much as the UCLA girls do."

The integration of the two different age groups makes for a variety of perspectives, an integral part of the Rosh Chodesh program. One such discussion was about when we can be our true selves. What began as a discussion about superficiality turned into one about everything from moments when we feel self-conscious to admirable female role models.

Aside from Rosh Chodesh celebrations, the women also have programs that give them a chance to bond and give back to the community: a Hannukah party for autistic children; raising money for Project Chicken Soup, which prepares and delivers kosher food to Jews living with HIV/AIDS; rock climbing; a sleepover in the UCLA Hillel's new building; and more community service.

While all of the younger participants have been active in Jewish youth movements, **Michal Marks**, their teacher at Sinai, says that the Rosh Chodesh program provides the impetus for some to return to Hebrew school.

—GOLDA AKHGARNIA

Milestones

■ **Daniela Weiss**, named executive director of New York's Drisha Institute, a center for women's study of Jewish texts. Weiss, 41, has an extensive business background, including her most recent stint as a vice president at Citigroup.

"It's part of the American Jewish dream to be an insider in a Fortune 500 firm or whatever," Weiss said. "For my parents, that wasn't possible. It was so exciting for me, that I could advance up the ladder, even as I was *Shomer Shabbat* and was eating fruit salads at business lunches."

Weiss says that people were surprised when she left Citigroup for Drisha. The focus in the Jewish community, she says, has not been Jewish education.

"The measure of success has been, can you make it now where it used to be impossible," Weiss said. "But we as Jews need to ask ourselves, are we 'succeeding' at the expense of understanding who we are as Jews, and of promoting learning?"

■ Political activist **Henna White**, cited by Women's e-News this year as one of 21 leaders for the 21st century. The South African-born White now serves as Jewish community liaison for Brooklyn District Attorney **Charles J. Hynes**.

■ Journalist **Paula Kassell**, who turned 85 last December. Kassel founded the newspaper

New Directions for Women in 1975, which ceased publication after 18 years, making it one of the longest-lived feminist periodicals. In 1986 Kassell shamed The New York Times into using "Ms," instead of "Miss" or "Mrs.," to refer to women.

- **Dr. Maxine Singer**, biochemist and president of the Carnegie Institute of Washington, D.C. Singer received the Distinguished Service and Leadership Award from the American Committee for the Weizmann Institute of Science. For 30 years, Singer, 72, worked on "transposable genes," a basic area of genetics research essential to the study of cancer.

- LILITH notes the passing of two exemplary women. **Esther Farber**, 67, in January. Farber was a major force behind modern Orthodoxy's feminist movement. She had been executive director for the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, and was among the first supporters of LILITH Magazine. Feminist sociologist and peace activist **Dafna Izraeli**, 65, died in February. Izraeli, a professor at Bar Ilan University, was one of the founders of Israel Women's Network. "She always found time for people—a great way to interpret the notion that the personal is political!" wrote a mourning friend after Izraeli's death.

- **Rochelle Shoretz**, **Idit Klein**, **Yavilah McCoy**, and **Ronit Avni** each are the recipients of a Social Entrepreneur Fellowship from the Joshua Venture, a San Francisco-based foundation that awards grants to young people to promote social innovation in American Jewish communities. Shoretz, 30, of New Jersey, created Sharsheret, a peer support group for young Jewish women with breast cancer; McCoy, also 30, the St. Louis-based Ayecha Resource Organization for Jews of color. Avni founded Just Vision, which strives to connect peace activists here and in Israel through the use of media. Klein has been one of the leading forces behind Keshet, a Boston-based leadership training community for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Jews.

Speaking of Israel and Politics...

Women will occupy 18 seats in Israel's newly-elected Knesset. Not many, out of a total of 120 seats, but note that this represents the largest-ever number of women MKs, and an increase of one from the previous Knesset. Despite the enduring mystique of **Golda Meir**, who served as Israel's fourth Prime Minister, women have consistently been underrepresented in Israeli politics.

Making a Seder with Soul

This year I am seeding the seats of my Pesach Seder with coffee-colored Jewish people, a few ecru-hued Jewish people, a couple not Jewish coffee-colored people, and some blended coffee and ecru Jewish people. Michael is Jewish and African American although his wife and kids are African American but not Jewish. I'll invite Carole and her family. Carole is Haitian, her husband is ecru Jewish and their kids are wavy-haired Jewish. Yasmin and Sam have an open invitation. She covers British and Caribbean Jewry. Sam covers "transplanted from Brooklyn to New Jersey" Jewry. Their three kids are two plain coffee Jews, and one blended coffee and ecru yeshiva student.

The Seder plate will look the same as Seder plates everywhere: eggs, *karpas*, lamb shank, etc. Gefilte fish will be served with dinner because ecru Jews love it, but my main fish dish will be a Cajun *courtboullion* (poached trout in a tomato based sauce with green pepper and onions that tastes great with hot sauce). I will make curry chicken using a recipe I clipped from Essence Magazine. Candied yams, collard greens and rice with roux gravy will round out the side dishes. For dessert my daughter, Eliane, and I will make sweet potato pies (with *matzo* pie crust), and I will pop open a can of Manischewitz coconut macaroons.

A few personal touches will make this Seder more "Afrocentric." Instead of ending prayers with a simple "amen," "Can I get an amen?" will achieve that 'churchy' feel some of us miss a little bit. And when we speak of enemies who have oppressed Israel, I can add, "*and* my brother and sisters of the African Diaspora whose enemies include: Arab trans-Saharan slave traders, Ferdinand and Isabella, Christopher Columbus, British colonialists, the French, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Jefferson Davis and Woodrow Wilson."

While thanking God for freeing Israel from Pharaoh, I will also mention **Toussaint L'Ouverture, Nat Turner, Mary Church Terrell, Marcus Garvey, Fannie Lou Hamer,** and **Adam Clayton Powell Jr.** for possessing the spirit of Moses in the freedom struggle. The Negro National anthem *Lift Every Voice and Sing,* and songs from the Civil Rights movement: *Down By the Riverside*, *We Shall Overcome* and *We Shall Not Be Moved* will end this soulful Seder.

My traditions will not be familiar to most Jewish people because I have other cultures to bring to the table, and, under my roof, all of them are integrated. — MO FLEMING

Homemade matzo cover by Mo Fleming. Fabric from Ghana, silver painted cowrie shells, hand lettered blessing.

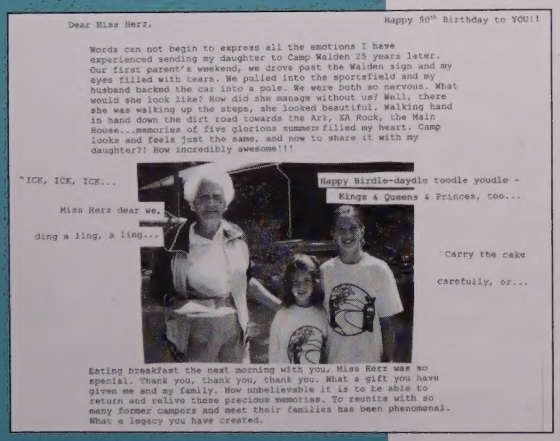
Strong campers, strong women

All-girl Jewish camps have a long history of successfully encouraging girls to be all they can, on the playing fields and beyond.

Camp Walden, on Walden Pond in southern Maine, and Camp Greylock for Girls, of blessed memory, on Racquette Lake in New York's Adirondacks, are good old non-religious all-girl camps run by smart, strong, idealistic Jewish women and attracting mostly Jewish campers. These women imprinted their values on girls who grew up to be successful women, many of them sending their own daughters to Camp Walden and other all-girl camps.

Helen Herz Cohen, 90, went from Walden camper to counselor to owner; she was the niece of one of the two women who founded the camp back in 1916. White-haired, in wrinkled khaki Bermudas, short-sleeved knit shirt and white tennis shoes, she is still the heart of the camp, though her daughter, Wendy, 51, now directs Walden.

Helen Herz Cohen



Dear Miss Herz,

Happy 90th Birthday to YOU!!

Words can not begin to express all the emotions I have experienced sending my daughter to Camp Walden 25 years later. Our first parent's weekend, we drove past the Walden sign and my eyes filled with tears. We pulled into the sportsfield and my husband backed the car into a pole. We were both so nervous. What would she look like? How did she manage without us? Well, there she was walking up the steps, she looked beautiful. Walking hand in hand down the dirt road towards the Ark, KA Rock, the Main House...memories of five glorious summers filled my heart. Camp looks and feels just the same, and now to share it with my daughter?! How incredibly awesome!!!

"ICK, ICK, ICK...

Miss Herz dear we,

ding a ling, a ling...

Happy Birdie-daydle toodle youdle -

Kings & Queens & Princes, too...

Carry the cake

carefully, or...

Eating breakfast the next morning with you, Miss Herz was so special. Thank you, thank you, thank you. What a gift you have given me and my family. How unbelievable it is to be able to return and relive these precious memories. To reunite with so many former campers and meet their families has been phenomenal. What a legacy you have created.

Naomi Levine, 80 this year, special assistant to the president of New York University, chair and executive director of the NYU Center for Philanthropy and Fundraising, grew up poor, never went to camp, and insists she'll never know what compelled her to take over Camp Greylock. Once started, Levine, 32 at the time, with zero camp experience, was "driven to keep it alive."

Both camps created safe, idealistic places that imparted the belief that all girls have something they can do well, and that girls should have opportunities for leadership.

Levine, a civil rights lawyer, was head of the women's division of American Jewish Congress when she and her husband bought Camp Greylock. She was AJC national executive director at the end of the Greylock adventure, taking two months off each summer to run the camp. Her husband, Leonard, an accountant who died two years ago, dutifully drove up from New York City each weekend to keep the rickety place running from 1955 to 1971, when they closed the camp doors for the last time.

Greylock may be history, but what it gave its girls lives on, as demonstrated by the 1995 reunion of 110 past campers at the campsite, where the old social hall still stands near what is now city folks' second homes. The video made by an NYU camera crew makes it clear the girls—now women—adore Naomi Levine. A no-nonsense woman, white hair, wire-frame glasses, tan pants, navy blazer, she is an unlikely object of adoration from the screaming, kissing, hugging, teary-eyed middle-aged women. They remember her as "a strong woman who said you could do anything you put your mind to." She had, and they did.

Though many have intermarried and one baptized her son in Raquette Lake ("Insanity," says Levine), they arrived with their Friday night prayer booklets, something Levine had put together using the Reform service and her own selections. The Sabbath candles were brown and green, Greylock team colors.

Levine was not one for sports. She says that she hated the water, was terrified of swimming and believed you should go sailing only when there was no wind. She made everyone wear breastplates on the softball field after a camper was hit by a ball. She says she took no pleasure in overnight camping: "I couldn't figure out how to go to the bathroom in the woods." Her idea of a perfect camp day was when rain kept everyone inside and the girls played jacks or read The New York Times. But the girls learned to excel in sports, took pride in swimming with superb form, and once they could swim to a distant island, felt unstoppable. Levine believes that part of camp is "exposing you to try things you wouldn't do otherwise."

The Sabbath candles were brown and green, Camp Greylock team colors.

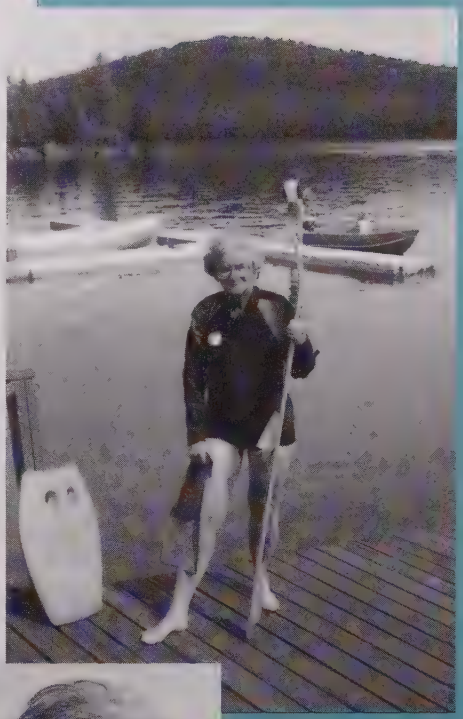
Levine's campers credit her with empowering them. They were intelligent, attractive, from Jewish homes in Philadelphia and Great Neck, and welcomed the chance for a summer away from boys. In fact, the male counselors (Levine says, "I didn't want a nunnery; I like men.") say their experience formed their appreciation of women as friends and colleagues, not just

dates and mates. A former tennis counselor remembers the summers as "our only opportunity to see how unencumbered women are when no men are around."

The way the former campers see these formative years in the 1950s and '60s: "We talked about politics. Naomi taught us about women's liberation. She expected a lot from everyone and that's what she got." From another Greylock girl: "When you were at Greylock, you were your real self. People saw your good, your bad. They loved you for your real self. I would not be the person I am today if I hadn't come here."

Levine sent three girls home for rudeness after the first summer. "If you picked on other girls, made people feel inadequate, you didn't belong here," she believed. That extended to color wars: "It's very important to behave graciously when you win." With little experience dealing with problem campers, after the first year Levine empowered the senior bunk to handle all discipline problems.

Levine sought out counselors who were fine teachers. One was a cultural anthropologist. Counselors from the South shared personal perspectives on civil rights. The Greylock girls remember Levine talking about privilege, "not just that you had it but that you're called upon to do something with it."



Naomi Levine

What these camps gave their girls lives on.

A kindred philosophy attracts an almost entirely Jewish group of girls to Camp Walden in Denmark, Maine. And those values extend to The Main Idea at Camp Walden, a free 10-day camp for poor, inner city girls from New York, Boston, Hartford, Connecticut, and Maine, whose families' eligibility for food stamps determines the girls' eligibility for the special camp session after the regular season. Since its start in 1968, The Main Idea has been funded largely by former Walden campers and their families. Contributing to the $100,000 budget for 100 girls, young Walden campers have given money from their allowances and bat mitzvah gifts. Helen Herz Cohen says that her goal is "to try to give [The Main Idea campers] a new window in life, see something different, inspire them to do something with their lives."

Cohen started as a Walden camper in 1924 and worked as a counselor before taking over as director in 1940. Still playing tennis at 90, she's "Ms. Herz" from May to September and Mrs. Cohen, wife of tax attorney Edwin Cohen the rest of the year. She believes that an all-girls' camp "helps you develop confidence in making decisions."

At the traditional girls' camp, where the eight-week summer experience now costs $6,650, Walden has 140 campers ages nine to 15 who generally stay five or six years. One-third are the children, grandchildren and/or nieces of previous generations of Walden campers. And traditions continue, like the Walden honor system, started by the camp's founders as a way of dealing both with internal discipline and with the likelihood that parents and other loving relatives would try to smuggle food into camp.

When Cohen took over Walden, the first young refugees from Hitler were already among the campers. She remembers one young girl who repeatedly carved her name into the infirmary's wooden floor. Cohen says that no matter how often she was made to sand off her name, she kept carving away because "this is a free country."

During the war years, campers made clothes, picked corn and beans, and were trained to spot airplanes. They raised money for refugee children's camps in Europe, and Walden kept going with food and gas stamps.

Now, as part of Walden's mission to help the campers develop a sense of responsibility, 12-year-olds handle the mail and 13-year-olds run the candy store. At 14, the girls begin leadership roles, with 14- and 15-year-olds invited to volunteer as junior counselors at The Main Idea. Sunday morning discussions are an enduring camp tradition, as campers of all ages discuss honesty, thoughtfulness, consideration. It may sound old-school, but it resonates both with the campers themselves and with their mothers.

One woman, connected to Walden as camper, counselor and parent, from 1937 through 1970, described Cohen's abilities: "For her counselors, she expected excellence and got it. There was something mystifying about the way she managed to extract a little more when you thought you were doing your best. You didn't want to disappoint her because then you would disappoint yourself.... To the campers, she was a grownup who was on your side. She saw something of value in each girl."

—AMY STONE

FRONTIER • BRIS

BY SHALA ERLICH

I did my first circumcision in Pocatello, a town in the southeastern part of Idaho, where the majority of the population is Mormon and the nearest *mohel*, should you have such an exotic need, is probably 170 miles away in Salt Lake City. We did it the medical way—in the hospital nursery with the baby strapped onto the "Circumstraint," a molded piece of plastic equipment, with Velcro fastenings to keep the baby's arms and legs from flailing into the way.

A baby on a Circumstraint looks a bit like a turtle on its back, but with a little white T-shirt, a bare belly (with the amphibious umbilical stump) and more accessible genitals. As a medical student, I'd seen a few circumcisions before, but for the first time I wasn't horrified. I was focusing every ray of attention on not cutting off too much of the baby's penis.

The attending physician (we'll call him Dr. Hammond) walked me through the preparations step by step, wandering off between instructions with his bifocals dangling from one hand. First I unfolded the brittle paper around my sterile gloves and wriggled my hands into them, avoiding contamination. I swabbed the baby's skin with iodine soap, let it dry, and injected the local anesthetic at ten and two o'clock at the base of his penis. There were two nurses going about their business behind me, and a student nurse with long, honey-colored hair leaning on the counter to watch. A row of shiny metal instruments was laid out beside the baby on a sterile paper blanket, like utensils for a very precise picnic. The baby had tired, his cries winding down as I waited for the local anesthetic to take effect, and was now asleep. I was amazed at my beginner's luck.

As I reached for some pincers, the student nurse asked, as if she had just considered it for the first time, "What are the medical reasons for circumcision?"

"None," said Dr. Hammond.

"Cultural and aesthetic," I muttered, gingerly separating the foreskin from the glans with the small, pointy instrument.

"Nobody in Europe is circumcised," he stated.

"Unless they're Jewish," I said.

"Well, right," he said. "I don't know why they started doing it here a century or two ago."

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Then he started talking, standing among the carts of new babies, "You know, we like to say God has told us to do certain things but usually there is a more practical reason. For instance, circumcision started over a thousand years before Abraham—when was he? Three thousand years B.C.?"—I nodded— "because some kind of parasite in the Nile would get in under the foreskin and give people nasty infections."

I was too wrapped up in my snipping and tying to keep up my end of this discussion. The baby was still sleeping, his belly softly moving with his breath.

"People ask me, 'What would you do?'" Dr. Hammond, raised Catholic and married to an Episcopalian, went on, "and I say, 'I have three girls.'"

He tucked his bifocals into his shirt pocket. "There's no reason to do it except for showering with dad."

As I finished up, I was pleased with myself. I was exhilarated by carrying off the new procedure, buzzing partly from terror and partly from triumph. Of all the powers I had imagined my medical education bestowing me, this was not one I had anticipated. What a great skill. As I tagged after Dr. Hammond, I started daydreaming about how I could moonlight as a *mohel*-ette if my budget ran low.

Down the hall, we joined up with the family practice resident for rounds in the neonatal intensive care unit.

"How are you?" he greeted me.

"Great!" I said grinning. "I just did my first circ."

He flashed me an appalled look.

"Yeah, I'm relieved it went okay," I said, trying to turn down the gleam in my expression. It dawned on me that a female circumciser enjoying herself was a scary prospect for some. And regardless of gender, how crude to be too pleased about doing something bad to a baby.

My feelings were more mixed than simple satisfaction anyway. My small, feminist thrill continued through the morning, along with a sense of displacement and let-down.

Circumcision was not just another medical procedure for me; it was already part of my experience as a Jewish ritual. Sure, it was ironic to get a lecture about the pointlessness of circumcision from the person teaching me how to do one. But beyond that, for me it was a moment when my own identity as a Jew seemed strange, isolated, possibly contradictory, and stubborn.

How had my path brought me to such an odd view of myself? I grew up with my Mom and step Dad and a brother and sister in Berkeley, California and visited my Dad, step Mom and two more siblings in New York during vacations, flying back and forth on my own from an early age. My California parents had an on-and-off membership at the Reform synagogue where I had my bat mitzvah; my Dad and step Mom walked weekly to an Orthodox shul. In both families, and in both communities, our Judaism was something I enjoyed unselfconsciously: the weekly beauty of Shabbat, the family seders, the love of books, a sense that history should be taken personally.

As a medical student at the University of Washington, my appetite for sampling new places pushed me to request a rotation in Idaho, a two-day drive from my home in Seattle. Alone in the car with my quilt, my skis and my books on tape, I crossed mountain passes and snow-blown expanses of high desert, watching the wisps of snow swirl across the road in front of me. I arrived after dark on the second day at a barren med student apartment with matted dark brown carpeting and all but two light bulbs burned out.

It's early January and a week goes by before I see the town during daylight. On the first evening, standing in line at the Albertson's with my light bulbs, milk, bread, and tuna, I wonder if I can possibly be the only Jew in Pocatello. Will the cashier pinpoint something different in my dark features and urban speech pattern, or is my identity so foreign here as to be invisible to the people around me? When Dr. Hammond says circumcision is a matter of showering, says no one in Europe is circumcised, I feel that invisibility like a cloak. When I speak up, offering my mild disagreement, I feel a twinge of alarm, and pride, in revealing myself.

I have taken myself to an unfamiliar part of my own country where my Jewishness and my medical training meet up unexpectedly, like two friends from a small town in the Midwest who run into each other on a boat on the Yangtze River and almost fail to recognize each other. I find myself in a small newborn nursery, carrying out a practice that has religious and cultural significance for me, in a place where it has none.

Dr. Hammond had the bald head fringed with hair and the prominent nose of a Franciscan. As the pediatrician covering hospital duties for the week, his style manifested itself in his brief, illegible notes, an irritable, distracted air, and a vehemently rationalist approach. He was well-read in the medical literature and a conscientious physician.

["Why'd you do that?" he once snapped at me when I showed him some calculations I had made the previous night to increase the caloric intake of a growing preemie. It wasn't clear to me where I had gone wrong. There was some crucial reason which made my formula unnecessary, but Dr. Hammond was in too much of a hurry to clarify it for me. My calculations were scratched out—as useless, apparently, as stringing garlic around a baby's neck. And yet, though he and the rest of the medical world saw little or

• I was alone in my car with my quilt, my skis, and my books on tape. •

no reason for them, he took the time to teach me how to do circumcisions.]

The medical version of the procedure sacrifices the *mohel*'s speed for near-foolproof security against accidents. The required sterilized instruments include a needle for the local anesthetic, delicate pincers and clamps, a bell-shaped device to protect the head of the penis during the cutting, a safety pin to secure the foreskin around the bell, and a small pair of scissors. The medical circumcisions I'd watched had taken at least 20 minutes from the time the baby was placed on the Circumstraint to when he was released, hastily re-swaddled and wailing, into the arms of one of the nurses. Strapping the babies down was the hardest part to bear—some took offense right away and never stopped their enraged, heart-rending cries through all the rest.

The second baby I ever saw born, named Christian by his young, unmarried parents, was the first baby I saw circumcised in a hospital. The doctor I was observing was re-learning the procedure, which she hadn't done since early in her residency. With hesitations and coaching, it took her 40 minutes, made excruciating by the baby's unremitting screams.

Long before medical school, when I was eight, I'd seen my brother Aaron's *bris*. We had it in our living room, crowded with friends and relatives. I remember weaving through their knees to get to the food—a fine spread of bagels and lox, crudités, and pastries. The only thing that horrified me then was the way Rabbi Weinberger fondly hefted my brother in one meaty hand like a loaf of uncooked bread dough. His handling was so careless that at one point he clonked my brother's head on the dining room table. The circumcision itself took about 15 seconds—before you knew it, it was over and the baby was sucking a few sweet drops of wine from my father's pinkie.

"That rabbi is kind of rough," my grandfather, a man rarely provoked out of silence, said afterwards.

Though not a lasting trauma as far as I can tell, circumcision does seem like a mean trick to play on a kid without a good reason. The passage in Genesis, the one that led to my grandfather's, and father's, and brothers' *brises*, goes like this:

And God said unto Abraham: '....ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of a covenant betwixt Me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations.'

So for Jews, circumcision is an emblem of a larger religious commitment that binds the community (of males) and the generations together. It is a mnemonic of the flesh, passed down for five thousand years. If medical school had mnemonics like that, no one would ever forget the cranial nerves or any step in the pathways of biochemistry.

Even my not-so-observant California parents considered circumcision an indispensable act of Jewish identity. I was three and a half when my brother Tal was born. Although my parents had explained everything about how he was conceived, they could not figure out a way to tell me about circumcision. Without saying anything, they took him to the hospital for a circumcision, where an Israeli friend read blessings. A few days later while I was watching my step Dad changing the baby, I piped up with the observation: "Now he looks just like you, JJ!"

◆ "Now the baby looks just like you, J.J." ◆

My brother Aaron's bris was informal, brief, unceremonious even. The symbolism of the tradition is so weighty that the execution can afford to be understated. How Rabbi Weinberger held my brother in one hand has become a family story. His *bris* is well-remembered, a part of the chain of family celebrations.

So it surprised me to realize that the ornate preparations of medical circumcision—the gadgetry and the rituals of sterile technique—add up to a procedure pretty empty of meaning. This is the difference between an emblematic and a literal act, whether you think of circumcision as a "token of a covenant" or, as in the title of one medical article, a "phalloplasty."

Although at the time I was taken aback by Dr. Hammond's dismissiveness of the health benefits of circumcision, I now think some of this indifference is just as well. Taking sides in the tussle between science and religion, it's usually easier for me to make fun of the hocus-pocus of religion. But in this case, evidence-based medicine looks a bit loopy pushing the practical reasons for something that up until the twentieth century had been performed principally as a symbolic act.

Circumcision became widespread in this country during the late nineteenth century thanks to physicians who believed the procedure prevented a range of physical and moral taints, including masturbation and venereal ulcers. These men couldn't tell the difference between symbolic and literal benefits of circumcision. In 1866, the vice president of the American Medical Association wrote:

> *the prepuce seems to exercise a malign influence.... beginning to affect [a man] with all kinds of physical distortions and ailments, nocturnal pollutions, and other conditions calculated to weaken him physically, mentally and morally; to land him perchance in jail or even in a lunatic asylum.*

But why do today's Mormon and Protestant parents of Pocatello, Idaho, want their baby boys circumcised? I never worked up the gumption to ask them. A small study was more

bold: it found that most parents make up their minds about circumcision before hearing any suggestions from their doctor. The most common reason parents choose circumcision is that they think it makes cleaning easier. In America, circumcision is noticeably more popular in families of higher socioeconomic level. So the perception of hygiene (real or imagined), along with a whiff of social respectability, continue to give circumcision its appeal.

It's also the aesthetics. As a six-year-old friend once said, a baby boy gets circumcised "so he won't wind up with a big, puffy dick like my cousin Andrew."

I went on to do five or six circumcisions in Idaho, some on screamers, others on quiet babes. There was a day-old 11-pounder, amazing as science fiction, who had the unfinished features of a newborn blown up practically to the bulk of a preschooler. He saw right through my deceptive cooing, even if he was born yesterday. He didn't care whether what I was doing had a meaning or not. As soon as he caught sight of my subversive feminism and my sharp little instruments he retaliated preemptively, getting me right in the chest with a high arc of pee.

Another day, the family practice resident had me circumcise a baby in front of his father, who had requested to watch. A miraculous high-wire steadiness, one that always eluded me during piano recitals, came over me. The child too was exceptionally calm during our performance and barely made a peep through the whole thing. Having an audience, and a father at that, made this circumcision more similar to a *bris* than any of the others I did.

I was pleased when the procedure came off flawlessly, proving me professionally competent. The father, a silent, pared-down man with his fingers crammed into his blue jeans pockets as if to keep them out of harm's way, remained outside the spotlight of my concentration. Afterward, I wanted to say, "Mazal tov!" but kept my mouth closed. I had done my job coolly and well; he had shown more interest than most parents. But I wished I could have offered him more joy and flamboyance, lifted his son up over my head, poured wine, told a joke, provided a good story to tell later. It seems unlikely the family ever says, "Remember that brown-eyed girl medical student who removed your foreskin?" It did not, after all, have the staying power of a ritual. ■

SHALA ERLICH has an M.D. degree from the University of Washington, and an interest in the intersection of medicine and culture.

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S · E · P · A ·

A Havdalah *Ritual for When a Marriag*

Naomi, one member of our Jewish women's group, asked us for a ceremony to mark her separation from her husband Joseph. Naomi and Joseph [their names have been changed here] had been married for 19 years, and in the past several years conflicts between them had escalated to the point where Naomi felt that it was not possible for her to continue in the marriage. She chose to mark the occasion of their moving to separate residences with a ceremony.

The Princeton *Rosh Hodesh* Group had been meeting regularly to mark Rosh Hodesh, the beginning of each month of the Hebrew calendar. We create and participate in new rituals, particularly to help each other make life transitions of all kinds.

Linda Oppenheimer, Shoshana Silber and I created the ceremony. I had spoken with Naomi at length about her decision, and I drew on this knowledge in preparing the ceremony. She herself did not participate in constructing the ritual, except to let me know that she was open to whatever our creativity produced.

We took a long time developing the themes and symbols that we finally used here, and many ideas were discarded in the process. We chose to use and reinterpret the symbols of *havdalah*, the ceremony marking the end of the Sabbath on Saturday night—the wine, the spices, and the candle—along with a plant, to enable Naomi to mark this transition to a new phase of her life.

About twelve of us gathered in a living room to conduct the ceremony. I served as the leader, with everyone taking part. It was a moving experience for all of us, and we reproduce it here for other women's groups to use or adapt.

What's needed:

Two candles and two individual candlesticks

A fireproof bowl

Wine and cups for all

Fragrance: pine branch, potpourri, flowers, etc. (we used fragrant wood chips)

Very small natural objects such as bark, leaves, pine needles, stones, clay (We used a flowering cyclamen, which was blooming in Israel at the time the ceremony took place; ivy is an other good choice.)

A nice ceramic pot with a hole in the bottom for drainage

Potting soil and a trowel

Newspaper to protect the table

Matches

A basin and a pitcher of water

Copies of the ceremony text for all (We gave Naomi a copy that contained only the blessings she was to say aloud, so she couldn't anticipate all of what was to come.)

We began with an abbreviated *Ma'ariv* (Evening) service so that another member of the group could say *Kaddish* for her daughter. We used the Reconstructionist prayer book, *Kol Ha'Neshamah*, with Marcia Falk's alternative *Amidah*, from which we selected poems and blessings. We sang the blessings in Hebrew and English, using Faith Rogow's tune for "As We Bless." (This tune is on her tape "The Courage to Dare.") The readings introduced the themes of endings, separation, and death, setting the tone for the ceremony that followed.

We sang a simple *niggun* which I'd written, a tune without words, which was meant to be wistful, sad, a little joyous, kind of a comforting lullaby when sung softly and slowly.

Lighting two candles, we poured wine for all, and recited three blessings together.

We praise You, Source of Life, for the wine that helps heal our wounds and points to future joys. (We drank the wine.)

We praise You, Source of Life, for the fragrance that enables us to savor pleasant memories of shared experiences. (We passed around the fragrant wood chips.)

We praise You, Source of Life, for the flame that lights the direction to the future, guiding us on new paths. (The flames of the two candles were held together for the blessing, and separated afterward.)

Naomi read these blessings aloud:

Blessed is the One who separates and makes distinctions.

Blessed is the One who guided me to join my husband under the huppah *[marriage canopy].*

Blessed is the One who sheltered us in our home.

Blessed is the one who has helped me to decide to leave this marriage.

Blessed is the One who separates and makes distinctions.

This part was very difficult for Naomi. She said later that she was surprised, and relieved, to realize that she

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·A·T·I·N·G

Comes Apart

BY RUTH BERGER GOLDSTON

might imagine "the One" as being involved in her decisions to marry and to divorce—she had previously felt solely responsible, and blamed herself for the outcome. We sang the *niggun* again at this point, to give Naomi a chance to collect herself.

We wanted to give Naomi an opportunity to talk about her marriage, to tell its story to the group and to herself. I had included in the ceremony text the prompts listed below so that each of us could help Naomi reconstruct the history of the marriage and reflect on it. I gave a brief introduction to this part of the ritual and then asked the first question.

When you met what was the attraction?

Courtship and decision to marry

Wedding/early years/birth of children

Moment(s) of greatest joy and sadness

What has made you the most angry?

Regret what you feel you could have done differently

What was your Jewish life like?

Turning points; looking back, when were they?

How have you changed since the beginning of this relationship?

What do you know now that you wish you had known then?

The rest unfolded easily and naturally for about half an hour. Naomi said later that it had felt important for her both to affirm for herself and also to share with us the things that had been positive about the marriage. As a group, we knew more about the pain and frustration that we had seen her experience than about the richness and excitement that had once been present in the relationship.

Once we had reached a natural stopping place, each person was asked to choose one of the small natural objects from the table and place it in the ceramic pot. I had earlier asked Naomi to bring something symbolizing her marriage to burn. She brought a copy of her marriage license that she had carried for many years as identification. She placed it in the bowl along with the fragrant wood chips, and lit them with both of the candles. We all watched quietly for several minutes while the certificate and the wood chips gradually turned to ash. While everything was burning, Naomi repeated the passage below phrase by phrase after me:

I, Naomi S., affirm that I have chosen, with sorrow and with anger, with regret and with relief, to end my marriage to Joseph B. Before we were joined; as of now, we are separated. Before, we shared our home; now, we live in separate homes. I leave behind me forever my married life with Joseph. I look ahead to a new life for myself, a life that will grow from the sweetness and the bitterness of our marriage.

Blessed is the One who separates and makes distinctions.

Blessed one who enables us to make transformations and new beginnings.

This was the emotional climax of the ceremony.

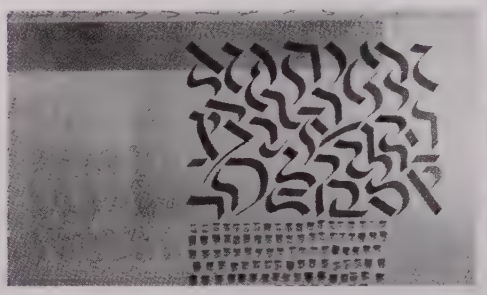
We mixed the ashes of the marriage certificate and the wood chips with potting soil and the objects in the pot, and we then placed the plant into the soil. I had originally imagined that Naomi would do this herself, but members of the group very spontaneously did it for her, and Naomi said later that it comforted her to have people take care of her in this way.

We ended by chanting our opening *niggun* again as we moved to a larger open space in the room. We stood in a close circle, with Naomi in the center. We had planned to do a kind of "trust fall," in which a person is literally handed from and supported by one person after another around the circle. Instead, we found ourselves growing quiet, hugging and slowly rocking Naomi as a group. We gradually stepped back from her, and she hugged each of us individually as we again sang our *niggun* and "As We Bless." We lingered in the spell of the moment, all of us bound together. ■

RUTH BERGER GOLDSTON, a member of a Princeton New Jersey Rosh Hodesh group, is a psychotherapist and former Chair of the National Havurah Committee. A version of this article appeared in the Spring 1993 issue of Lilith.

The New, Improved Jewish Divorce: *Hers/His*

BY VICKI HOLLANDER



HEBRAIC ARTWORK BY ELLEN ALT, BASED ON THE DESIGN OF THE TALMUD.

When the phone rang with the news that my *get* (Jewish divorce) ceremony could take place the following day, I was ready. My civil divorce had come through several days earlier, but it hadn't made me feel divorced. I was the one, not David (not his real name) who had insisted that we have a *get* as part of the divorce negotiations. We had been married ten years, separated one year. We had a beautiful four-year-old daughter. The ending of the marriage was, for me, painful and completely unexpected.

I know that many women feel hurt by the implicit sexism of the *get* ceremony, but I didn't feel that way. I wanted to stand before the entire Jewish community—including the most traditional—and have my new status declared and validated. I believed that a Jewish ceremony, unlike the civil event, might emotionally support me through a difficult transition: from being married to being single, from parenting as a couple to parenting alone.

I also knew that I had to construct a parallel ceremony. Five males (one rabbi, two witnesses, David and the scribe) would be present along with myself) at the traditional *get* ritual. I decided to assemble my own cadre of supportive women friends. I worked out a schedule of guard-duty shifts (a *shomeret*) in which different friends would accompany me through the day. I also decided to write my own *get* document, to create my own customs for the day, and to construct my own sort of support-network *minyan* (quorum).

On the one hand I felt unspeakably sad and afraid; on the other, I felt strong and dignified, ready to claim this ancient ritual as my own, to recognize that the Jewish divorce ceremony was a route that was available to me for my own use in healing.

At dusk on the evening before the ceremony, I began a 24-hour fast: I lit a white candle and started to compose my own divorce document, what I call a "document of transition" [see page 17] using special textured paper that I had bought for the occasion and a real ink pen. I was all alone, and I sat on the living room couch watching the candle flicker in the December dark, thinking, crying, preparing myself for the fact that tomorrow my marriage would be officially over. Going to bed that night, I felt quiet but not alone, in the grip of a large unfolding thing, but also feeling in control of what was about to happen.

The next morning, wrapped in my *tallit* (prayer shawl), I said the *viddui*, a prayer of confession generally recited before one's marriage, on Yom Kippur and on one's death bed. I wanted to acknowledge my part in the death of my marriage—the patterns I had perpetuated that were not healthy, the skills I lacked, the times I had not listened to my intuitive voice.

Paralleling Yom Kippur, I wore no jewelry and no makeup. I dressed in white, the color of the *kittel*. (The *kittel*, a burial shroud, is also traditionally worn my Jewish men on their wedding day and on various Jewish holidays.) In a white skirt, white blouse and cloth shoes I felt bleached, cleansed, pure and present. White felt right to me, a symbol both of death and of rebirth.

I stayed alone until mid-morning, needing time to feel sad, to reflect, to be with my God. I would have liked to have my family with me during parts of the day, but as my parents live in San Diego and my sister and brother-in-law in Cleveland, that wasn't possible. My daughter had slept over at David's house and was now at school. I started to feel nervous and frightened, with a painful ache. So many relationships were now dying, and dreams, and parts of myself.

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Joanne, my oldest friend in Seattle, picked me up at 10:30. We drove to the *shul*. Joanne sat by my side for about half an hour, through the first part of the ceremony. Around the large wooden table sat the two males witnesses, plus the officiating rabbi, the scribe and David. Except for the scribe, I knew everyone else in the room. I could feel their sympathy. There was small talk and joking around. I think they were afraid I would cry if there was much silence. Although as a woman I was legally powerless at this ceremony, I felt I had a great deal of authority. I had the power to get to the emotional core of the situation.

The ceremony began with the rabbi explaining the proceedings to us. He asked, formulaically, "Are you ready to go through with this?"

I answered, "Yes."

David answered, "Yes."

There was a terribly mournful feeling in the room.

After some more formalities, the officiating rabbi said we could leave for two hours while the scribe hand-wrote the *get*. Joanne drove me to my friend Bria's apartment. I had not yet shown anyone my "document of transition," and I wanted both to hear it read by someone else and to read it aloud myself. I hoped it would cut through the numbness. Hearing it and then reading it, I felt both grief and the beginning of resolution.

DOCUMENT OF TRANSMISSION

On the _____day of the week, the _____ day of _____ 574___ since the creation of the world, the____day of _____, 199__ as we reckon time here in _____, _____ I,_____daughter of _____ & _____ (Hebrew names) _____ do depart from the bindings and vows of my marriage, (kedushin) that took place _____ years ago on _____ in _____ to _____, son of _____ & _____. (Hebrew names) _____

This day I am no longer bound to the task and to the commitment to cherish and honor you in faithfulness and in integrity as my husband.
This day I am no longer bound to stand as wife, companion, and partner.
This day I am no longer bound by honor or by law to affirm and maintain kedusha within our relationship.
This day I am no longer set aside, special to only you.
This day the kedushin vows become null and void.
I am no longer bound by the vows of kedushin.
Hereby, I am no longer kedosha to you, no longer your wife and you are no longer kadosh to me, no longer my husband.
On this day according to our tradition I depart as a free woman.
I stand as a free agent in the Jewish community, in the world, and before myself.
I stand having completed our people's traditional way of unbinding a marital relationship.
I stand as a Jewish woman with dignity and with strength.
I stand restored to a single unit as a whole and complete person.
This shall stand as a document of release and a letter of freedom in accordance with the values of our people, Israel.

_____ *(woman's Hebrew name)*

_____ *(woman;s English name)*

_____ *Witness*

_____ *Witness*

**This document draws upon the ketubah, the* get, *and my own writings*

Bria drove me back to the *shul*, where a third friend, Joanna (not Joanne), met me. We entered the room for the last part of the ceremony, watching the completion of the writing of the *get*, the artful, calligraphic document inscribed with infinite precision. The officiating rabbi read it aloud in Aramaic, then he cut the parchment with a small blade, symbolically cutting our union, giving concrete form to the ending of our marriage.

He gave the parchment to David who dropped it into my open hands. I tucked it in between my left arm and my heart, as I was instructed to do. Holding the ripped document near my heart felt like a real enactment of what was happening: this most close and intimate part of my life was over. One small gesture captured a year and a half of what I had been feeling.

I then gave this beautiful, disfigured parchment back to the officiating rabbi, relinquishing it. I walked the traditional three steps backwards and three steps forward, signifying my acceptance of the document. I didn't feel at all shamed by my allegedly "passive," distaff role in this proceeding. As I took the steps, I could physically feel myself standing tall and walking straight. It felt like the ceremony was mine.

I waited until the very end to hand David (my now ex-partner) my "document of transition." Though I had not gotten to hear my own document read aloud in this room, I had heard it read aloud with Bria, and I felt satisfied. I was glad to be performing the final, closing rite.

The ceremony was over. It had felt foreign, yet greatly comforting. I was participating in an ancient ritual of unbinding, following in the path of many people who had passed before me who also had been hurting and torn.

Joanne drove me back to my apartment. Slowly I bathed, adapting the customs of mourning rituals in which water is the symbol of purification and renewal. I changed from my white clothes into comfortable, colored, happier clothes. I had bought myself a new pair of colored earrings for the occasion—a present to myself.

At around 5 p.m., eight additional women friends joined us, making a *minyan*. Each woman brought a dish for dinner. We had salads, casseroles, wine, bread, and almond tarts for dessert. The meal was a combination mourner's meal of consolation and of transition.

Lighting colored candles, we spoke of endings and of new beginnings, each of us spontaneously sharing some ending and beginning from our own lives. We sang the blessing over wine and talked about the meaning of this blessing—vines, rootedness, being connected with the earth, growth. It was a metaphor for our processes.

When we said the blessing over bread, we talked about how many coordinated actions are necessary to produce a loaf of bread—the finished

product—no less the mystery of the initial grain. The talk was simple, which felt right. "I am not all alone," I said. "All of you have accompanied me through this difficult, coordinated process. Today marks not only the closure of my marriage, but formally recognizes how my friends have been with me through all of this." I thanked everyone, acknowledging that in my neediness through this crisis, I had made demands on my friends.

When we said the *shehehiyanu* blessing (to mark my new beginning), we each reflected on what we wanted for ourselves now and in the future, what dreams we had. What new possibilities existed for me now? There had been so many changes. I was so aware of being a woman with women.

As the evening neared an end, we all went outside. Arm in arm, in small groups in the moonlight, reminiscent of the mourning ritual, we walked round the block. (At the end of *shiva,* it is traditional to walk around the block, symbolizing the end of the mourning week.) My life's path would now be different.

When we came back to my apartment building, we formed a circle on the lawn. I talked briefly and quietly about my feelings throughout the day. Then we hugged and parted.

The ritual had begun at dusk and it ended at dusk. I felt very full, very satisfied. The day had, after all, been mine. ■

VICKI HOLLANDER will soon be rabbi of Congregation House of Israel, Hot Springs, Arkansas, after 13 years of hospice and palliative care work, counseling, writing, teaching, and congregational work in the Pacific Northwest. *This article is reprinted from the Summer 1990 issue of Lilith.*

Emerging on the Other Side of a Marriage

Divorce Is a Mitzvah: A Practical Guide to Finding Wholeness and Holiness When Your Marriage Dies

by Rabbi Perry Netter, Afterward by Rabbi Laura Geller, Jewish Lights Publishing, $16.95

The Get: A Spiritual Memoir of Divorce

by Elise Edelson Katch, Simcha Press, $10.95

In the Talmud, the tractate on divorces appears before the tractate on marrying. The wry explanation for this curious order? It's better to learn the cure before getting the disease. If the metaphor holds, two recent books on Jewish divorce demonstrate that the cure can be as varied as the disease.

Rabbi Netter's *Divorce Is a Mitzvah* (the title is a line by Rashi) is a constructive, sensible, even hopeful book that attempts to mitigate the scars and the stigmas usually associated with divorce. He weaves the story of his divorce from a wife of seventeen years with practical information, psychological explanation, and readings of traditional Jewish sources. He is especially forthright on the importance of making divorce as safe as possible for the children, to which end he devotes two full chapters. Netter and his wife gathered their three children on the family/marital bed to break the news that they were divorcing; this to convey the message that despite the changes to come they would still be a family. The difficult but also healthy, holy path, advises Rabbi Netter, is for the ex-spouses to actively co-parent the kids, to subordinate their pain with one another to meet the needs of their children.

Trying to find a healthy, holy path to divorce

Rabbi Netter wants the *get* to be understood as a meaningful ritual rather than the businesslike implementation of a contract. The *get*, he believes, has the power to provide closure to a failed relationship; if approached consciously, its ritual can allow man and woman a final, emotional un-coupling. He deftly narrates the grief he felt at his own *get*, and likens a divorce to a death—the death of a marriage, of innocence, and of an intact family. And he calls for more organized support for the divorcee within the Jewish community, something akin to the support we give to comfort a mourner.

Elise Edelson Katch's memoir, *The Get* testifies to how searing and unreasonable divorce can be. Edelson Katch, a prominent Denver therapist, has brought to print a haunting tale that, sadly, reads more like untouched diary entries than a crafted work. She and her husband were both nonobservant Jews, freespirited children of the 1960s, when they fell in love and married. When their daughter was three years old, they joined a *havurah*. Ten years later, during what Katch believed was a temporary separation, her husband, who had increasingly been drawn to a nearby congregation of "black hats," initiated proceedings for a *get*. Edelson Katch tells of late night telephone calls from an Orthodox rabbi she never met who harassed her with whispered questions for information needed to write the *get*: "What is your name, what is your father's name?" Her husband, who does not attend their daughter's bat mitzvah, dates a friend of Katch, and quite conveniently loses most of his assets, continually asks her for a *get*. Edelson Katch refuses. She is not ready; she wants their civil divorce finalized first. When she does consent, she gets an Orthodox *bet din*. In a room with three men who will not meet her eye, she feels deeply shamed. She too yearns for a meaningful context, a ritual to help her mourn the death of her marriage. I found it particularly piercing that Katch, who throughout the book conveys a sense of her own genuine need for spirituality, be it New-Age affirmations or the lighting of Shabbat candles, should find her marriage so torn and herself so hurt by religion coming to her via the patriarchy.

KAREN PROPP is the author of two memoirs, *In Sickness & In Health: A Love Story* and *The Pregnancy Project: Encounters with Reproductive Therapy.* She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts with her husband and son.

Celebrating Lilith MAGAZINE

The award-winning, independent Jewish women's magazine you're now reading has been the voice of feminism for Jews since 1976, helping change the ways Jewish women see themselves and their roles in the Jewish community.

When LILITH debuted, four women rabbis had been ordained, the shelf you needed for a collection of books about Jewish women was only one cubit long, and women's seders were virtually unheard of. In 27 years, LILITH has reported on and often triggered an explosion of Jewish women's scholarship, the flourishing of Jewish women's creative work in all the arts, and the passionate engagement of women in every aspect of Jewish thought and action. All this has helped to ensure women's stake in Judaism. This means not just female participation in Jewish life, but women's investment in the very processes by which Jewish life is defined, from Orthodox women scholars preparing to make decisions in Jewish religious law to women philanthropists spurring a more equitable division of power in the Jewish polity.

Through investigative reports, memoirs, news, fiction and poetry, reviews, resource listings, and fresh feminist scholarship, LILITH challenges Jewish women and girls to reclaim traditions, create new rituals and celebrations, find exemplary role models, and work toward a just and egalitarian Judaism.

A historic exhibition, which opened at Hebrew Union College in New York this February, and runs until June 27, scans the subjects LILITH has made its own. It documents the impact of feminist Jewish journalism during the pivotal years 1976-2001, and includes, along with wonderful wall panels, fine art illustrations for the magazine, original manuscripts, iconic photographs, and memorabilia supporting Jewish women's roles in the world.

"LILITH Magazine is the activist public voice for a changing community of Jewish women," says Laura Kruger, curator of the exhibition. "With compassion and forthright reporting, LILITH tackles controversial issues that are frequently ignored or discredited. LILITH has created a forum in which divergent opinions can be heard without censure, in which women, often isolated within their own communities, are reassured and directed to the resolution of their situations. LILITH is not the traditional 'self-help' magazine. Through thought-provoking articles, first-hand memories, and feisty letters, LILITH has created a roadmap of opportunities for contemporary women."

Here, we bring you selections from the wall panels from the show. The exhibition will be ready to travel outside New York in summer 2003, and for many seasons thereafter. To find out how to bring this exhibition to a campus or community near you, please call (212) 757-0818.

Accompanying the exhibition, Lilith has put together an extraordinary program: a retrospective history of Jewish women's impact on Judaism, 1976-2002, as charted through 76 issues of the magazine. Visit www.Lilith.org to learn about events happening now and as the show goes on the road.

RUTH DAVIS

Opening reception at Lilith exhibition in New York

Amplifying Unheard Voices

When Others Turn a Deaf Ear

When no one else was paying attention, Lilith was listening as women told stories—in their own poignant words—about the ways they are. The magazine is a megaphone for women living Jewish lives in unexpected diasporas: feminist teens, Jews by choice, the elderly. And in Lilith, people in crisis—men as well as women—write about passions and turning points in their lives, and about their feelings of disenfranchisement from Judaism.

A journalist once asked us, a little irritated, "Why so many *memoirs*? So much in the first person?" The answer? For an authentic chronicle of the experiences of Jewish women, we need the diverse parts. The Iraqi girl in California whose Hebrew school tells her that her family's traditions are wrong. The executive whose colleagues in the Jewish world never knew she was a lesbian. The *converso* admitting to Jewish practices her grandmother taught her to hide. The octogenarian whose kids confiscate her autonomy. The grown woman remaking the doll the Nazis tore from her four-year-old arms. We have to hear them all.

And also...

What Does Afghan Women's Suffering Say to Us? (Winter 2001)

10 Women Tell: The Ways We Are (Winter 1976-77)

Jewish Girls and African-American Nannies (Winter 2002-03)

New Mexico's Secret Jews: Is It Safe to Tell? (Winter 1991)

Connecting with Black Women (Winter 1991)

Campus Life: An Insider's Guide (Spring 1989)

The Mean Scene: Blaming Teen Girls (Fall 2002)

Transgender Jews (Spring 2002)

"I Am a Woman, a Jew, a Chilean" (Summer 1990)

Jewish
BURIED, BUT NOT SEVERED, JEWISH CONNECTIONS RUN UNDERGROUND FOR TWENTYSOMETHINGS
"When I was an undergraduate I felt I had a real role to play, creating new programs at Hillel. Then, after I graduated—BOOM!—in the course of one month I was a non-person in the Jewish community. No voice, no community, no place to go."
Susan Weidman Schneider, Fall 1997
PERSIAN GIRLS SPEAK:
How Najeeb Are You?
How much discrepancy is there between what you do and what you tell your parents that you do?
Mishana hid a boyfriend for two years from her parents. "They don't know anything about my social life. I make my own set of rules but they leave me no choice. I think they've raised me with enough morals to make my own decisions."
Shadi also hides many things from her parents including that she has had sex. Also: "I won't tell them I am interested in women. I won't tell them I have lesbian or gay friends, but I hide lesbian friends more because," she says sarcastically, "you know they are all recruiters."
Rachel also lies. "I have lied to my parents so much that I can't even count. I do it not so I hurt them but so I don't hurt them. They don't want to know the truth. I've found out the hard way. Almost all of these lies deal with people of the opposite sex."
Pegah Hendizadeh Schiffman, Winter 1998
"MY CHILDREN ARE DISAPPEARED"
AN ARGENTINE MOTHER'S NIGHTMARE
Renee Epelbaum has lost her three children—two sons and a daughter—and she still does not know how they died. Or why.
The crime occurred in Argentina, during the military junta's reign of terror....Her three children were kidnapped in 1977, she said. Luis, who had been a medical student concerned about the country's poor, was kidnapped in August 1977, at the age of 25. The younger children—Claudio, then 23, and Lila, then 20—were abducted three months later.
Jewish women in prison
The rabbi who took us there said that the Jewish men prisoners across the road had been incredulous. "What are nice Jewish girls doing in a place like that?"
The place is the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, the only state prison for women in New York.
The Jewish women *are* nice.
And what they're doing there is time.
Susan Weidman Schneider, Issue 5, 1976
A MODERN IDENTITY CRISIS:
BLACK OR JEWISH?
Two or three times a week, on the streets of San Francisco, complete strangers walk up to Lisa Feldstein and ask, "What are you?"
She's not Indian, South American, Puerto Rican—her favorite suggestion—French. The child of a black Christian woman and a white Jewish man from an Orthodox family, she usually gives them a straight answer. But for Lisa, and the estimated thousands of other biracial children of black-Jewish origin, the answers are not so simple.
A large segment of this biracial population was born into the liberalism of the 1960s, whose adherents hoped to achieve, by activism and example, an America in which race and religion would invite no bias. They have not succeeded. Indeed, in the subsequent three decades, the ideal has shifted more than once away from color-blindness toward racial and ethnic identification—stranding those black-Jewish offspring in hostile territory.
Sarah Blustain, Fall 1996
IS ISRAEL REALLY LIBERATING FOR ETHIOPIAN WOMEN?
The mainstay of the women's participation in Jewish life in Ethiopia is ritual purity. Once a month for seven days, the Torah specifies, she goes to live as a special male outcast hut. At the end of the separation period she washes herself in the nearest river or lake.
Women willingly accept the separation as part of their lives, believing that are protecting their husbands and children from their "impurity." For many of the women this break from the drudgery of their daily chores is welcomed.
Many Ethiopian women are distressed that in Israel they are no longer able to be secluded in a menstrual hut during their periods. (A female social worker says, "It wouldn't have been hard, especially in absorption centers with large Ethiopian populations, to make some arrangements for the building a place where menstruating women could go.")
A Convert's Passion for Judaism
For my born-Jewish husband, it would have been less disruptive if I had fallen in love with another man.
Kathleen Peratis, Spring 2000
Dolls to Live By
"AMERICAN GIRLS" SERIES DRESSES AMERICA IN CHRISTIAN CLOTHING
I save the money to buy Samantha, carefully hoarding it in my pink plastic safe. One long-awaited afternoon, she arrives wearing what the catalogue describes as a "taffeta dress with a fashionable pleated front and a dropped waist circled in burgundy satin." I make Samantha's life match my own. When I have to get glasses, I order her a pair. Although I can't afford all of her advertised possessions, I provide for her nonetheless. In lieu of the steamer trunk ($175), I make her a walk-in closet with a cardboard box, pipe cleaners and oak-colored contact paper. I imagine that she understands everything I am feeling, that she is living out the same thing in a parallel doll world. Despite my love for Samantha, there is one thing that alienates me. According to the catalogue, Samantha has "high hopes for the best Christmas ever."
Naomi Goodman, Fall 1999
JEWISH MOTHERS & Gay SONS
Still, I worry. As a Jewish mother, I'm keeping a close watch, even as my son Joseph and I begin our search for the right college. I want all the usual good things, including a sizable Jewish presence. And one more thing: an active and visible community of gay and lesbian students, so that Joseph can come into his own. I hope that he'll date. And that he'll find somebody Jewish.
Alice Sparberg Alexiou, Spring 2001
My Perfect Family: Two Moms
To my Grandma, I — by dating a non-Jew — was the one who threatened Jewish continuity, not my lesbian mother.
What communities of Jewish women do you wish you understood better?

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Our Bodies/Ourselves

Pride, Pain, Prejudice

Beginning at the beginning, we women have inherited a culture in which the "Earth Mother"—representing our bodies, the Earth's body, and most everything good in between—has been long deposed, leaving many of us in negative relationships with our own skin, and others of us yearning for embodied self-esteem and celebration.

Lilith has created and published new rituals for body-related lifecycle experiences, publicized research on Jewish women's genetic inheritance, taken seriously the recipes and kitchens of our grandmothers, and reframed aspects of our own sexuality. Jewish women think a lot about their bodies, perhaps encouraged by a tradition that doesn't support a mind-body split. We want our readers to have a bead on it all: that the Sumerian Queen of Heaven, 4000 years ago, asked, "Who will plow my vulva?", that mikvahs heal us in unexpected ways, that eating *taiglach*—or kibbe—brings some of us closer to our mothers. The Talmud speaks of "belly joy," and Judaism is, in many ways, a lusty, sensual, sensuous, juicy, visceral, sex-positive culture. Our bodies, in myriad ways, have a lot to say.

And also...

Instructions for the Birthing Team (Winter 1990)

Purim as Holy Body Day (Spring 1998)

Breast Cancer: How Risky Is It To Be Jewish? (Spring 1994)

Hair, O Israel (Spring 1995)

Healing: A Special Section (Winter 1996)

A Blessing for Your Breasts (Fall 2001)

The Halakhic Skinny on Piercing and Tattoos (Summer 2002)

Jewish Women & Food
EAT, EAT, DIET! DIET!
One Young Women's Calendar
Vagina Monologue
BREASTS
"I don't know," I say to a friend who is contemplating her second voluntary foray into plastic surgery. At sixteen she was given a brand new nose, a goyische nose, de-bumped, retrofitted to go with the rest of her *shayne punim*, the blonde hair, robin's-egg eyes, patrician brow. "I've been thinking lately that cosmetic surgery seems so Christian, all that pain and self-sacrifice.... Or maybe I'm just thinking too much."
"You're thinking too much," she sighs, irritated. Then she grabs her breasts through her shirt, lifting their round heaviness with both hands, showing me, the small-breasted friend, the evidence for her discontent.
"Look, I'm just tired of looking like my mother, that's all. I'm only 28."
Hanna Blank, Spring 2001
MASTECTOMY:
Twelve Months after Surgery
A Bathing Ritual for the End of Mourning
I don't remember when the idea of a mikveh immersion ceremony came to me, except that, like so many of the blessings of that year, it came when I both needed it and was open to receiving it.
Jerilyn Goodman, Fall 1995
"I Got My Period at Pizza Hut"
The Queen of Sheba's Fuzzy Legs
I stopped shaving my legs, on and off, when I was in college. ...My father was horrified. It even says in the Midrash that women should shave their legs, he told me, because when the Queen of Sheba came to visit King Solomon, he would not be with her until her legs were smooth.
Understandably, my father's argument did little to convince me that my legs would be better off bald. But his comments did start me thinking about the Queen of Sheba.
..."What is a cause of praise to the free, of shame to the unfortunate, a cause of praise to the dead, of shame to the living, of joy to the birds, of agitation to the fish?" asks the queen. When Solomon answers that flax can be all of these things, he admits that one substance can have many purposes. Flax can be food that sustains a bird; it can also be made into a net with which to catch a fish. Flax can be made into a beautiful linen garment for the rich, or a crude garment for the poor; it can be made into clothes for the living or a shroud for the dead.
...By admitting that flax does not fit in to any one category, Solomon must acknowledge that human beings can also behave in conflicting ways, and that the Queen of Sheba can simultaneously be a woman, and a powerful ruler.
Rachel Kranson, Spring 2001
What's *Jewish* about your relationship with your body?

Uncovering the Darker Stories

Taking Risks to Report the Truth

Sometimes we worried, at Lilith, that too many of our stories were "bad news"—addictions in Jewish families, painful Holocaust stories, domestic violence in Jewish homes, genetic diseases, AIDS among Jewish women —and not enough of our stories were "good news." But we value female Holocaust survivors' narratives as a precious legacy. And the Jewish community's characteristic "silence" around many problems and pathologies in our culture serves only Judaism's collective sense of shame; it doesn't serve the individually disempowered among us: the female, the young, the old, the poor, the mentally or physically ill, the hidden.

For many reasons, perhaps —anti-Semitism, concern over the marriageability of offspring, Jews' defensive sense of being culturally superior— Jews have been, as a people, allergic to our own "dirty laundry." Lilith, though, has been staunchly committed to uncovering painful truths in our midsts, and we've occasionally taken hard knocks for doing so. "Speaking our truths" is a core piece of Lilith's feminist, ethical mission; with our readers' help, we intend to speak more of them.

And also...

Five Women's Holocaust Stories (and How to Teach Them) (Winter 1994)

Why Jewish Women Get Raped (Summer 1986)

From Privilege to Poverty (Summer 2002)

Hidden Children of the Holocaust (Fall 1991)

A Refugee Again—This Time in a Country Called Widowhood (Spring 1994)

A Lesson in Dying (Fall 2000)

Why Jewish Girls Starve Themselves (Spring 1998)

Surviving Incest in a Holocaust Family (Winter 1993)

WIFE ABUSE, DRUGS AND SILENCE
SELECTIONS FROM NOGA, ISRAEL'S FEMINIST MAGAZINE
prepared and translated by Naomi Danis
THE FLESH TRADE: AROUND THE WORLD AND IN ISRAEL
About one quarter of the prostitutes in Israel are imported. An estimated 1,000 women arrive in Israel for this purpose each year, and 70% of the prostitutes in Tel Aviv come from the former Soviet Union. Other countries of origin include the Baltic States, South Africa, and the Dominican Republic.
There are reliable testimonies that these women are held in brothels against their will. Some are beaten and raped by gangs specializing in robbing them of their self esteem until they believe that prostitution is their only way out. Some are drugged for this purpose. A few "disobedient" women have been murdered.
Mira Ariel, Spring 2000
based on a report by Martina Vandenberg with the help of Noga Appelbaum for the Israel Women s Network
An Incest Survivor Reclaims Her Place in the Jewish Community
From the age of two until nine, I survived physical and sexual abuse from my grandmother. From ten to thirteen, I survived my big brother's sexual abuse. From twenty to thirty, I survived physical, sexual and psychological abuse by my (now ex-) husband.
I am not unique, nor even rare. Studies show that 15% to 19% of Jewish families Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, are abusive, a rate that is the same for non-Jewish families. Other women generally leave after three to five years of family violence, Jewish women stay eight to ten years, leaving in our thirties and forties, while our non-Jewish counterparts escape in their twenties.
Lilian Green, Winter 1992
Equality Soldiers On in Israel
Protecting Women from Sexual Harassment
For decades, sexual exploitation of women in the military, the workplace, the political arena and indeed in any public or private forum was viewed as a fact of life. Israeli women knew that they could expect to be accosted by their bosses, that army jeeps were dangerous venues, that professors had wide license to make intrusive remarks, that hospital nurses were fair game for anybody wearing a white coat.
How did they cope? In the vast majority of cases by silence, by shame, by keeping a low profile, and sometimes by playing the very game they had been unwillingly drafted into. One mature Jerusalem attorney recalls that when she was a young lawyer a senior jurist repeatedly put his hand on her thigh. Complaining seemed out of the question. "What could I do?" asks the woman who until today is too nervous about the man's power to name him. "I was just a nobody, and he was a leader of the profession."
The sweeping 1998 Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law is considered the most [illegible] legislation of its kind in the world.
On the Autopsy Table in Lodz
"Selo, come quick to the Anatomy Building."
"What's going on?"
"Come and see for yourself," answered Sarah, a girl I knew well from the years spent together in the Lodz ghetto.
"Selo," Sarah said triumphantly, "take the scalpel and start the dissection of Hans Biebow."
HANS BIEBOW
I looked at the exposed body again. The narrow forehead, the shape of the jaw, were the sole remainders of Hans Biebow, the man who liquidated the Jews of Lodz.
Is it Biebow, the six-foot-tall Wagnerian god in shiny black boots, whip in hand? What happened to the golden hair, the steel blue eyes? That's how I remember him as he stood on the podium during the evacuation of the Lodz ghetto in the summer of 1944. I was eighteen.
I was among the crowd of listeners, and when the sun caressed Biebow's blond head I felt that God had abandoned us and joined the company of Biebows.
I wondered why we called the lowest human instincts of hatred and violence "dark" forces when they should be called "blond" ones.
A Paradoxical Legacy:
Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach's Shadow Side
An Orthodox rabbi by training, Rabbi Carlebach took down the separation between women and men in his own synagogue, encouraged women to study and to teach the Jewish texts, and gave private ordination to women before most mainstream Jewish institutions would.
It is an alarming paradox, then, that the man who did so much on behalf of women may also have done some of them harm. In the three years since Rabbi Carlebach's death, at age 69, ceremonies honoring his life and work have been interrupted by women who claim the rabbi sexually harassed or abused them. In dozens of recent interviews, Lilith has attempted to untangle and to explain Rabbi Carlebach's complex legacy.
Sarah Blustain, Spring 1998
Shicker
my friend said, stammering, embarrassed,
bringing the word up from childhood,
when I said, "No one at our
meetings is Jewish."
Shicker: a drunk, the drunk,
is a good translation,
but the sh of shame and shush,
the parody of a drunk's
slurred speech
makes shicker meaner. And
the ker is like growling.
And then my husband
remembered Uncle Willie
who died of cirrhosis,
that when anyone in the family mentioned Willie,
they whispered, shicker.
Besides, Jews don't drink.
Besides, my son's never drunk in that way.
If it weren't for the stink of gin on his pores in the morning,
if his eyes weren't veined with scarlet for no reason,
I wouldn't have a clue he was "using."
Sondra Zeidenstein, Summer 1997
Family Secrets
Did your Jewish family once have a retarded relative hidden away? An old photograph holds new revelations about the author's long-dead sister.
Do you have a story that's still too hard to tell?

Rethinking Our Relationships

Empathy, Sexuality, Community

What has been so surprising to Lilith's editors as we've looked back at the relationships Jewish women have explored in articles, poems, short stories and art, is the powerful role that ordinary objects play in triggering women's associations with people they care about. The chair she gets at the seder is the status clue for an unmarried niece. Sisters go through their late mother's top drawer, and a pile of memories spills out along with the pearls. Who inherits the photos, the furs, the frying pan? The humble material of daily life carries emotional weight for women.

The "Bubbe's tales" that came to Lilith in manuscripts 25 years ago have been subsumed by analytical—even respectful—understandings of the authors' *mothers*, a much harder subject to tackle than grandmothers. The feminist take on family life has expanded to include fathers, too, with Jewish women writing to explore, time and again, how to get Dad to talk.

But the relational world of Jewish women is more than the people we're connected to through blood and marriage, more than sex, sentiment or solitude. It's women's web of friendships with our colleagues, our students, our mentors and more.

And also...

The Magical Properties of Worrying (Spring 1992)

Raising Jewish Kids in an Intermarriage (Fall-Winter 1983)

Jewish Women/Jewish Men: Detoxifying Our Relationships (Fall 1987)

16 Jewish Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Fall in Love (Summer 1994)

Sisters and Other Family Legacies (Spring 1989)

Coming Out in the Jewish Family (Summer 1989)

Single, Female and Jewish in the Internet @ge (Fall 2001)

In College and Beyond: Friendship as Play (Summer 2000)

"GOD HAS MANY MESSENGERS" –RASHI
A Wise-For-Her-Years Thirteen-Year-Old Looks Back on Life
Last spring, we lost three grand parents within five weeks. I wanted so much to have Bubbie and PopPop and Saba at my bat mitzvah in the same way that my brother had, but there was nothing I could do about it.
"I hate to say this, Annie" my mother said, "But I think you've been handed a theme. It's called loss. It's not what you've chosen; it's what's chosen you." Mom said that in the face of difficult things in life, God sends us many messengers ("*Harbay sheluchin yesh la-Makom*"), and that it is *our* task to find these messengers; they don't just come knocking on your door. And that these messengers make *sense* out of painful things. All of a sudden, in a flash, I realized I wanted to have my bat mitzvah at Greenwood House, a Jewish nursing home in Trenton, New Jersey. In this way, in some fashion, I thought my grandparents could come to my bat mitzvah.
Anna Schnur-Fishman, Winter 2000-01
A Sexual Bill of Rights in a Nursing Home
Old they may be, but the residents of The Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale still want sex, intimacy and privacy. And the Home wants to help them.
...To this end, the bill of rights encourages encourages staff to help elders find the resources and privacy they need, and commits the Home to helping make such arrangements: a private room for one member of a couple, for instance, and regular sensitivity training for staff. Key to this policy ...is the understanding of sexuality as a "right," not a "behavior." The Home's attitude is "How can we support them?" rather than "What can we do about it?"
Sarah Blustain with Nina Green, Winter 2000-01
The New Minority
JEWS WHO CHOOSE JEWS
With the high rate of intermarriage, LILITH looks not at the glass half empty (as has everyone), but at the glass half full. Lots of Jews are finding Jewish partners. Who are they? Why are they making these choices?
"To my non-Jewish boyfriend, the U.N.'s 'Zionism-is-racism' resolution proved that Zionism was indeed racism. To me, it proved that the U.N. was anti-Semitic."—Karen Pryger
Rachel Altman, Summer 1994
"Pretend I'm Dead, I tell him"
The ideology of egalitarian childrearing ranks as one of feminism's most meaningful legacies.
This doesn't mean that everything in the domestic sphere is perfectly egalitarian. In our house, for instance, my husband can still say in a surprised tone, "Hey, there's no milk!" And my sense is that young women are still hearing similar exclamations from the men in their lives which suggests that, though guys may be willing to share the household tasks, the responsibility of remembering and noticing still falls predominantly on us.
What to do about it? Sometimes, when my husband becomes domestically challenged I like to reply, "Pretend I'm dead."
Lesly Goltin Pogrebin, Winter 1999-2000
OLGA CHATS
About Life, Love and Jewish Identity
Olga Silverstein, doyenne of family therapy, co-founded the Women's Project, a collective that critically examines sexism in the practice of family therapy.
"You can see why the stereotype of the over-involved Jewish mother becomes a caricature. See, the Jewish mother is doing what her Jewish culture has taught her to do—to be very involved in the life of her family...to function, powerfully, as a central force around which the family can exist. Not just the immediate family, but the whole mishpocha. We're the only culture in the world that I know of that even has a word for mishpocha. There's nothing in the English language that relates us to the extended family. And if there's no word for it, it doesn't exist.
The Jewish mother is very scary to another culture, to a culture that values, above all, autonomy and individuation of its children."
Spring 1989
Mother loss
A section exploring the reverberations through a lifetime when a girl's mother dies prematurely.
White Butterflies
"Lady," I said, "we live on the twelfth floor. She's dead."...At 15, I sat shiva by myself at my apartment.
...From that point on, I was basically on my own.
Yael Flusberg, Summer 1999
Jewish Families Are Different too true.
Illustration by Nicole Hollander, Spring 1989
Beating Patriarchy At Its Own Game
The story of Rebekah's relationship to Isaac disturbed me, when I was growing up in the '50s....The story is of a strong woman tricking her older, weaker, blind husband, and it is not a pretty one....The Rebekahs of the world make us feel uncomfortable in a different way than the Liliths. Lilith is forced to leave Adam and the garden because she is not male-defined, and refuses to play within the system. Rebekah, on the other hand, is an absolutely traditional wife in a situation that her strength and intelligence tell her is intolerable.
Mary Giles Schwartz, Winter 1976
Jewish women tend to live farther away from their mothers than women of other ethnic groups; they visit parents less, but talk to them on the phone more. Why?

Reclaiming Our Reputation

Too Smart, Too Strong, Too Sexy, Too Loud

Jewish women in America have been caught between two conflicting sets of instructions: "Be all you can be" and "Behave nicely."

These injunctions may not be so different from the messages every female gets as she's socialized into womanhood. But Jewish women's role models have been a little different (as our history has been). The shtetl models of outspoken activism (the yenta, the "big mouth" organizer, even the baleboste who makes soup from a stone) contrast sharply with the more passive, straitlaced Victorian Lady, an ideal which led some Jewish women into a frenzy of straightening our bodies, our voices, our hair, our noses, our houses. And no other women have been so consistently portrayed and betrayed by diverse and disparaging stereotypes: Domineering Mother. Pouting Princess. Rabid Radical.

One of Lilith's missions is to lay claim to the powerful positive role models at the heart of these images. In every decade of Lilith's existence we have had to revisit this subject, explaining to each new generation of Jewish girls why calling a peer a JAP is, in fact, a slur.

And also...

"In a *coma*! I thought she was *Jewish*!" (Spring-Summer 1977)

Comedy and Consciousness: What Can We Laugh At? (Spring 1987)

Marjorie Morningstar Revisited (Fall 1976—premiere issue)

Assertiveness at Any Age (Fall 2000)

Lusty, Doomed Heroines from Jewish Berlin (Spring 1998)

The Venus of Willendorf Was Jewish? (Spring 2001)

Passover: The Four Girls Within Us (Spring 1994)

SOPHIE TUCKER
THE BETTE MIDLER OF HER TIME
Enticed by Sophie Tucker's frank and sultry lyrics, which seemed to promise a freer world for both women and men, a generation grew up listening to her records, often in secret.
Joyce Ander, Spring 1997
THE MYTH OF LA TREI AND
The myth of Barbra is the myth of the essentially Jewish Jewish woman. According to the myth, Jewish women are passionate, outspoken, liberal, talented, Semitic looking, and from Brooklyn. Even before Barbra's retirement, the myth seemed like a thing of the past—and we know that it never really existed. And yet the myth still resonates, as richly and as melodramatically as the ballads that flow forth from the chambers of Barbra's glorious nose...
Rachel Kranson, Winter 2000
Women with Ph.D.s ...and Their Mothers
Two Generations of Women Describe the Tensions
A narrow bookcase was the first object I always noticed when I entered the small, immaculate apartment of my mother...on the top shelf, copies of assorted publications written by her twin daughters and three of her granddaughters, all of whom had earned doctorates during her lifetime.
...I am certain that my mother was pleased when my twin sister and I were accepted by an Ivy League women's college, and...in my own album I have a telegram saying "PROUD OF YOUR BEING PHI BATED NEWS APPRECIATED AND CELEBRAT ED." However, I cannot recall her ever questioning me about what I planned to do with my splendid education after I graduated from Wellesley College in 1935.
"Sleep with me!" ("Shikvah Immi!")
For big-mouthed gals who use their maws not only for talking, but also for singing and noisy orgasms, there is one hidden feminist infiltration in the Torah that only (shhh!) LILITH subscribers know about. It is in Genesis 39, where Potiphar's wife (Lauren Bacall) issues the shortest seduction line in the Bible—just two smoky words, "*Shikvah immi!*" ("Lie with me!") It's a sexy line, with just enough of that promising dominatrix zing. The puzzlement for commentators has been the Masoretic cantillation mark (a *shalshelet*) over the following word, a mark that is extremely rare and that connotes a weird sound—a kind of prolonged, intense, upbeat, ambiguous ululation. It is Potiphar's wife's orgasm, planted there nearly 2,000 years ago by feminists who, alas, lived before their time.
Let us now praise
Big-Mouthed Jewish Women
Who's Afraid of Authoritative, Empathic, Justice-Seeking Jewish Women?
...ever...one who denigrates us by calling us JAPs.
Rabbi Susan Schnur, Fall 1998
JAP-BAITING ON CAMPUS
"BLAZES OF TRUTH"
Someone spray-painted the word JAP on their dormitory door," a student recounted. "But now I wonder—which one of the girls was being called JAP? The one with the dozen Benetton sweaters, or the one who'd gotten 750 on her L-SATS?" The question being, of course, which is ...the one who's demanding ...and the self-sufficient one?
Princess
Lilith Queen
From an early advertisement inviting people to subscribe to Lilith Magazine
What do you say to people who try to tell you jokes about Jewish women?

1-888-2-LILITH

Catching On about
Power and Politics

Lilith's editors have often been viewed as trouble-makers. Why did we need to be so nasty about the sexism in Jewish organizations? Aren't there more serious problems? And why so critical of Jewish women's organizations, especially in the 1970s when hardly any were willing to take a stand on reproductive rights, or the ERA? Jewish women have become bolder in the decades that Lilith has been making trouble. Now Jewish women's organizations lead the charge for equal rights, work to end abuse, fund women's health initiatives, clamor for what feels, just, fair, belated. And women have created new Jewish entities focusing on feminist scholarship, social action, Israel.

But still… Women's work is grotesquely underfunded (as we who create Lilith magazine know all too well). There's ambivalence, even among women, about the financial clout many can now wield. And women are still alarmingly underrepresented in the corridors of power. Watch this space (or, rather, watch the pages of Lilith) to see whose portraits will be lining those corridors soon!

And also...

Five Women Who Shake the World (Summer 1991)

Identity Politics at Summer Camp (Spring 1993)

Women in the Pulpit: Reworking the Rabbi's Role (Fall 1990)

A Women's Mideast Peace Dialogue (Summer 1988)

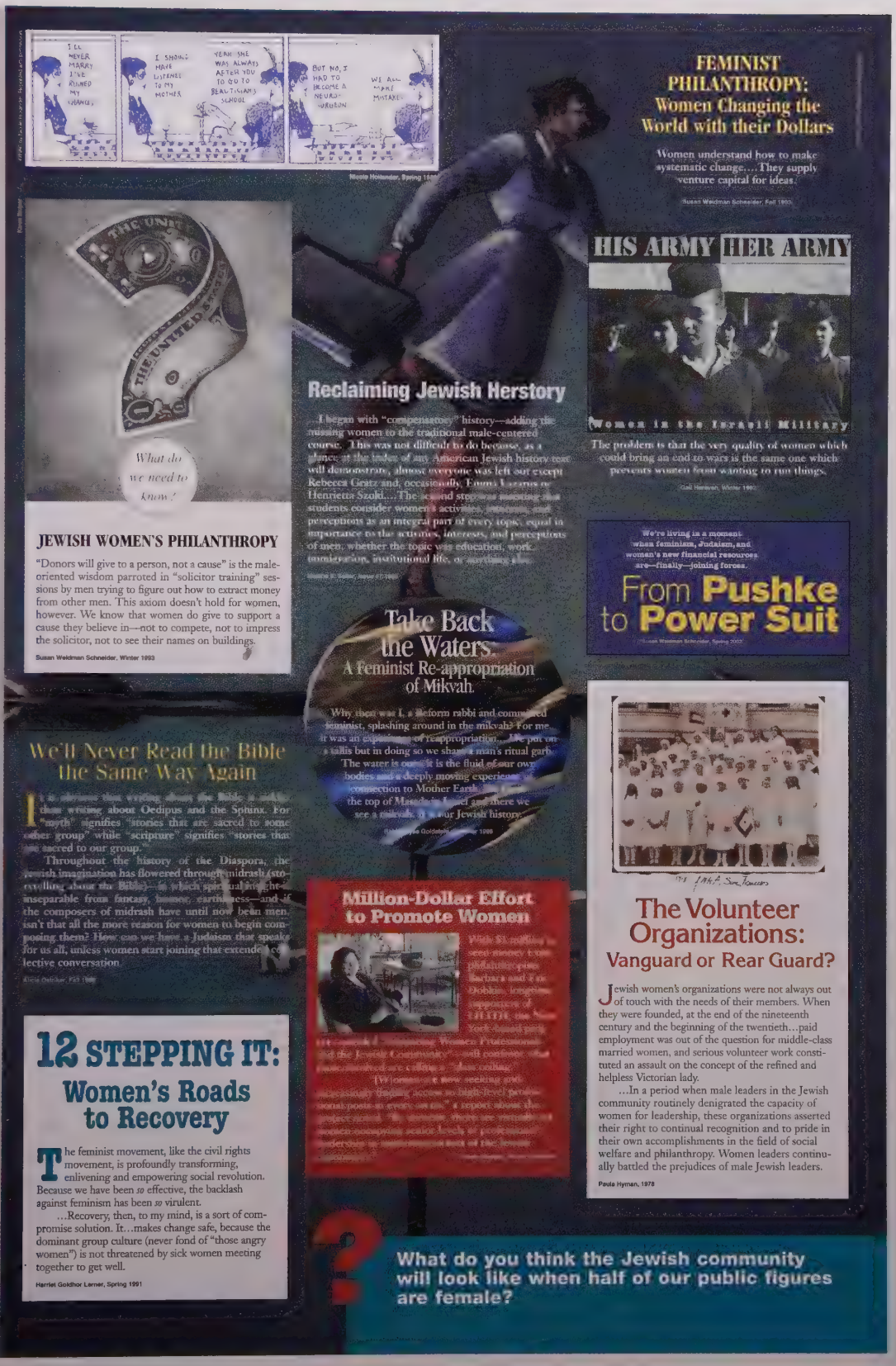
Jewish Feminist Scholarship Comes of Age (Winter 1990)

Women Funding Social Change (Fall 1993)

A Feminist Take on Jewish Children's Books (Fall 1996—and every fall)

Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement (Fall 1999)

Eldercare: The Personal Is Now Political (Spring 2000)


I'LL NEVER MARRY I'VE RUINED MY CHANCES
I SHOULD HAVE LISTENED TO MY MOTHER
YEAH, SHE WAS ALWAYS AFTER YOU TO GO TO BEAUTICIANS SCHOOL
BUT NO, I HAD TO BECOME A NEURO-SURGEON
WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES
FEMINIST PHILANTHROPY: Women Changing the World with their Dollars
Women understand how to make systematic change.... They supply venture capital for ideas.
HIS ARMY HER ARMY
Women in the Israeli Military
The problem is that the very quality of women which could bring an end to wars is the same one which prevents women from wanting to run things.
What do we need to know?
JEWISH WOMEN'S PHILANTHROPY
"Donors will give to a person, not a cause" is the male-oriented wisdom parroted in "solicitor training" sessions by men trying to figure out how to extract money from other men. This axiom doesn't hold for women, however. We know that women do give to support a cause they believe in—not to compete, not to impress the solicitor, not to see their names on buildings.
Susan Weidman Schneider, Winter 1993
Reclaiming Jewish Herstory
We're living in a moment when feminism, Judaism, and women's new financial resources are—finally—joining forces.
From Pushke to Power Suit
Take Back the Waters
A Feminist Re-appropriation of Mikvah
Why then was I, a Reform rabbi and committed feminist, splashing around in the mikvah? For me it was an exercise of reappropriation... We put on a tallis but in doing so we shed a man's ritual garb. The water is ours. It is the fluid of our own bodies and a deeply moving experience of connection to Mother Earth.
We'll Never Read the Bible the Same Way Again
Million-Dollar Effort to Promote Women
The Volunteer Organizations:
Vanguard or Rear Guard?
Jewish women's organizations were not always out of touch with the needs of their members. When they were founded, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth...paid employment was out of the question for middle-class married women, and serious volunteer work constituted an assault on the concept of the refined and helpless Victorian lady.
...In a period when male leaders in the Jewish community routinely denigrated the capacity of women for leadership, these organizations asserted their right to continual recognition and to pride in their own accomplishments in the field of social welfare and philanthropy. Women leaders continually battled the prejudices of male Jewish leaders.
Paula Hyman, 1978
12 STEPPING IT:
Women's Roads to Recovery
The feminist movement, like the civil rights movement, is profoundly transforming, enlivening and empowering social revolution. Because we have been so effective, the backlash against feminism has been so virulent.
...Recovery, then, to my mind, is a sort of compromise solution. It...makes change safe, because the dominant group culture (never fond of "those angry women") is not threatened by sick women meeting together to get well.
Harriet Goldhor Lerner, Spring 1991
What do you think the Jewish community will look like when half of our public figures are female?

Rhythms of the Blood

Sex in an Orthodox Marriage

BY C. DEVORA HAMMER

Tonight is the fourteenth night of my menstrual cycle and I am going to the mikva. Ever since I first saw blood two weeks ago, I have not touched my husband. We have not passed things one to another, nor carried a load together. I sleep in bed alone. If we share a meal, there must be something extraneous on the table to remind us of our status. We have not poured each other's drinks, nor eaten food from the same plate. My husband has not seen any part of my body that is normally covered in public. This man whom I know more intimately than any other is more forbidden to me than a stranger.

Tonight I will immerse myself in the mikva and I will touch my husband again. In twelve days my period will come, and we will separate once more. Such is the cycle of our marriage.

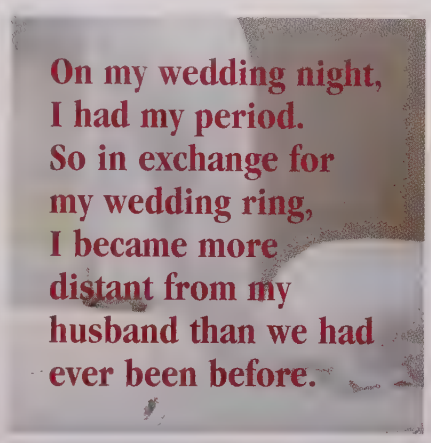
I have observed Jewish law all my life, and yet with these laws governing sex in marriage, the *nidda* laws, I am as awkward and unfamiliar as a *ba'alat tshuva*, a returnee to the faith. Nothing in these rules resonates with any other kind of practice I have experienced, and the discipline required to follow the Code of Jewish Law on *nidda* is almost unendurable. Yet we do endure them, month after month after month.

1-888-2-LILITH

For many years I have wanted to write about *nidda*, but the words did not come, because the subject has simply been unbearable for me. The frustration, the resentment and rage against a system that constantly separates me from my beloved, the only man I have ever known and likely will ever know, stops up my tongue. But the meaning of it is starting to come to me now, and I want to write the story of my growing into an understanding of *nidda*, of the truths that I have found.

II.

On my wedding night, I had my period. Before we were married, we were not permitted to touch; the moment after we were married, because I was menstruating, all the *nidda* rules of separation were heaped on us in addition to no touching. And since our Sages considered a bride and groom who have not yet consummated their marriage to be especially vulnerable to breaching the *nidda* rules, extra barriers were legislated to prevent sexual contact between them. The couple may never be alone, day or night. If they sleep under the same roof, two people must sleep with them. So we drove home from our wedding with a pair of teenagers in the back seat, and if my husband and I wanted to speak privately in our apartment, we had to escape to the stairwell and whisper, as if *we* were the teenagers. In exchange for my wedding ring, I became more distant from my husband than we had ever been before.



To establish the end of my period for Jewish legal purposes, I had to do an internal exam with a white cloth. For ten days, the cloth kept coming out red. (*Who's ever heard of a ten day period*? I thought. *Perhaps I'll bleed forever!)* And then, by some miracle, one time the cloth emerged the same color as it had gone in, and I began the seven White Days. While we waited for the *nidda* time to end, we had to find sleeping chaperones. In the end only my in-laws were left to do the job; I felt like a child bride.

In our private time, my husband and I would study the laws of *nidda* together, like prisoners analyzing the terms of their sentencing. Learning was one thing we could share, but it did not make me feel any better. The physical tension of separation between two people newly and deeply in love is indescribable. I thought I would go out of my mind.

The night came when I was permitted my husband's body, and in exchange I was thrown into a manic cycle of activity that governed my sexual life. Soon after our first encounter, my period came again, and my husband was snatched away from me. After the bleeding stopped, there were the seven White Days, when I had to check myself twice daily, in the morning and just before sunset. I was constantly looking at the clock to make sure I hadn't missed the crucial minute for checking. Then the day of the mikva came, with all its restrictions: no eating meat or kneading dough, nothing that would leave difficult-to-remove dirt. At the meal I ate before beginning mikva preparations, I was so nervous, I gorged as if Yom Kippur were coming. The few hours between this meal and my return from the mikva were a millennium in my mind, and I fueled up in anticipation.

Then I ran the bath, took a book in with me and started the long soak. My husband would walk in ten times as I lay there, but was unable to look at my naked body, so I only saw his back as he noodged me about every nonsense item imaginable, like, "Where's the laundry?" He was nervous, excited. Then I dressed and went to the mikva, where I would take another shower, and mentally go through the whole body: comb hair, pluck eyebrows, blow nose, all the way down. I did it all like an automaton, the thoughtful side of me excised from this fanatically cleaned body. Part of me was screaming mad. What is all this about? Why all this activity just so that I can touch my husband? Why does he not have to do any of this? And then, even when I came back to my husband, the counting continued. Every single day of the woman's cycle has to be counted, to determine the monthly anniversary of the beginning of her last period, when she either has to do some more internal examinations or temporarily stay away from her husband. It was like being in a whirlwind, with a constantly changing status having dramatic consequences. Checking, measuring, withdrawing, responding. None of it was on my cue, all imposed by this massive external book of law.

Then I conceived, and for seven years I was pregnant or nursing, or both, and never bled except after childbirth. Now we had the time to learn each other's bodies, slowly, at our own pace. I didn't need the separation of *nidda* to come back to my husband with refreshed interest; I *enjoyed* the constant company of his body.

After the birth of my second child, I was in *nidda* for five months. The normal rules of separation became excruciatingly difficult after childbirth. For example, we couldn't hand each other the baby, and my husband couldn't look at my naked breast while I nursed. When the night of my immersion arrived after almost half a year of waiting, I found the door to the mikva locked. In despair, and disbelief, I just stood there, in full view of the whole community, burning with anger and humiliation. Eventually, the mikva lady sauntered up, eating an ice cream. She was *so* sorry—she had been out visiting. I cried as I stepped down the stairs to the mikva; it seemed to me at that moment such an impossible system and even more impossible people administering.

After I stopped nursing, my period started coming regularly again. We were thrown back into the relentless cycle of sudden separation, and just as sudden coming back together again. I steeled myself to it, as part of the package that I am bound by and which binds me to my husband, my family and our God. I looked for nothing good in it.

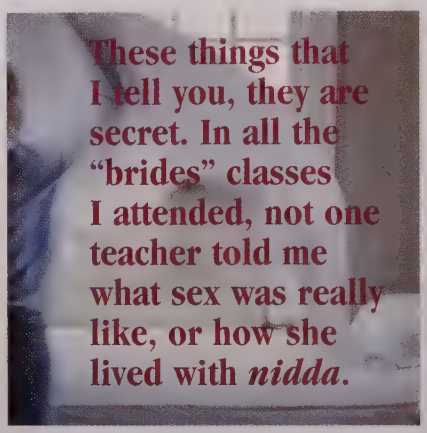
But as the years go by, I am beginning to understand it more. The rule is not just that a couple may not touch each other during *nidda*, but that they be *exceedingly careful* not to touch. When my husband comes towards me, I give him space, enough to ensure that we won't bump. He does the same for me. And so

there is created around me *lebensraum,* living room, an area he cannot invade. When I am in *nidda*, my bed, too, is my own, and I stretch out on the full queen size of it. He may not lie or sit on it even when I am not around. (He has his own queen-size bed.) At meals, I am not his servant, neither pouring his cup nor serving his plate. And so on, each of these disparate regulations adding up to this: *me, alone*. The Law has created for my body space and time. Not governed by whim, and non-negotiable.

A social worker in an ultra-Orthodox community has told me that an abused wife will often become suicidal if raped while in *nidda*. She may be forced to have sex at other times in her cycle, and not recognize the abuse, because she believes her body is her husband's property. But when she is in *nidda*, the Law says her husband must be *exceedingly careful* to keep away; at this time her body does not belong to him. So if her husband transgresses the *nidda* rules, with its terrible Heavenly consequences, she realizes he must truly be evil. In defiling her God-granted space, her husband destroys her entire world; she can no longer live with herself in it.

III.

These things that I tell you, they are secret. In all the "brides" classes I attended, not one teacher told me what sex was really like, or how she lived with *nidda*. We were bound by the Western taboo on sex, and the Jewish mandate of modesty surrounding *nidda*. As a new wife, I was trapped in my struggle to cope with new desire, strict rules, the strangeness of it all. But unlike a woman who had newly become observant, there was no one to talk to. So I turned to books.


These things that I tell you, they are secret. In all the "brides" classes I attended, not one teacher told me what sex was really like, or how she lived with *nidda*.

The literature disappointed me. One type described how women threw out the primitive and despised mikva rituals with their wigs as they sailed into New York harbor. Rabbis and others exhorted those who clung to the old ways, urging them to abandon a practice leftover from the cult in the Jerusalem Temple two thousand years ago. In the same vein, feminists reinterpreted *nidda* as a part of a misogynist taboo against female blood. In reaction to this onslaught against *nidda*, religiously observant writers wrote texts with titles like *Waters of Eden*, and *Hedge of Roses*. Here I found graphic details on the anatomy of both a woman's body and the mikva, and praise for the beauties of human intimacy and the benefit of Family Purity on a couple's life. *Family Purity*? Neither of these literatures described my experience nor provided comfort in any way. My husband and I were deeply committed to Jewish law, and were not going to give it up despite its primitive origins. But I found no beauty in what we were doing either, no benefit to our marriage, and the mikva was just another burden on my busy life. There was something akin to childbirth in the wholesale lies they fed us: no one tells you the pain is so bad you may go into a coma, they tell you all about the three stages of labor but nothing of the truth. I did not want to be preached at; I wanted to hear the voices of women who lived with this.

In *Tehora*, Anat Zuria's new Israeli documentary on *nidda*, I thought at last I might find voices of real people. The movie brings us Natalie, who used to be observant but who, as her marriage deteriorated, stopped going to the mikva. Katie is a Modern Orthodox wife who has a condition which causes her to bleed continuously. Shira, newly engaged to be married, is being initiated into the *nidda* laws by her mother. And then there is Anat Zuria herself, a secular woman who keeps *nidda* because her husband made it a condition of their marriage.

Tehora (an untranslatable word often incorrectly rendered as "purity") uncovers many secrets of the observant world, mainly through Natalie's voice. "The first time I gave [my husband] my hand, that I touched him, was after the *huppa*," she says. "Can a man put himself in the place of a woman who has never been with a man…and in one moment has to go from a state of nothing to everything? It's almost like rape...It's not natural. It's not right."

The Code of Jewish Law mandates consummation of the marriage the night of the *huppa*, but Helen Krohn, a consultant on sexuality to the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, says up to 25 percent of ultra-Orthodox couples have problems accomplishing this. Would the tradition allow for a gradual learning of the physical part marriage, so as to avoid the kind of crisis described by Natalie? *Tehora* raises an important question here.

After the birth of twins, Natalie went to the rabbi to ask for permission to use birth control, and he gave her two years. When she went back to ask for an extension, pleading exhaustion, he gave her just four months. Here Zuria faces another sacred cow in the Orthodox world: we are not Catholics, yet the right to use contraceptives is controlled by the rabbi. How can a man, a stranger, possibly know whether a woman is ready to have children? What criteria does he use to decide how long she will be pregnancy-free? (The trend in the ultra-Orthodox world is to ever-larger numbers of children, and the roles of the fathers, the mothers, and the rabbis in this is something that would be a marvelous topic for another film.)

Natalie eventually stopped going to the mikva, lived a celibate marriage for a while, and then divorced. I thought of the women who are raped when in *nidda*, and how the *nidda* laws offered Natalie a strange kind of protection. She was moving away from her husband, and by not going to the mikva, she created a kind of trial separation within the marriage.

Katie is an observant but modern woman who decided with her husband to stop keeping the rules forbidding touching. "I had three small children at home. I wanted the comfort and affection. I wanted him to come back from work and…hug me," she says. "I decided at one point that I'm not willing to give it up. It's not that, God forbid, we threw out going to the mikva. To be part of the month together and half the month apart is still very important to us."

I often wondered, in the long dark days after childbirth: who on earth can keep these rules? No one is looking, no one will

know, why do people follow the Law in the privacy of their homes? Glukl of Hameln, in her famous twelfth-century autobiography, describes sitting by her adored, dying husband's bed, wanting to give him a farewell embrace, but she was menstruating, and so could not. Frankly, at such a moment, and many others, women don't want sex at all, they just want a hug, or to hand off the screaming baby. It is the extra laws of separation—touching, passing—which make the system so difficult.

Finally, we watch as Shoshana, a professional *nidda* counselor, coaxes her daughter Shira into the world of mikva. Shira resists her mother's sermonizing throughout her engagement, but when we meet her again, right after the wedding, she tells the camera, "It is good to have some separateness after so much closeness." (I wondered what her first night had been like.)

Throughout the film are images of Zuria dragging herself to the mikva, making the preparations, resentfully being inspected by a mikva lady. She and the other women in the movie have nothing positive thing to say about the practice. We do not see a single healthy, sexual marriage living with *nidda*—we see divorce, abnormal bleeding, immature bride, secular woman and religious husband. And we do not see recent appropriations of the mikva by lesbians keeping *nidda*, or by women marking important changes in their lives—menopause, onset of labor, conversion. So while Zuria raises vital questions, she, too fails to present a nuanced truth.

IV.

When I come home from the mikva, my husband always asks me, "Are we permitted to each other?" This used to irritate me. Can't he see I've been preparing for hours? That I've been out and come back with wet hair? After I ignored the question a few times, he changed his tack. "This is why I do it, sweetheart. The rule is *'pe sh'asar, pe sh'hitir.'* The mouth that forbade you to me must be the same mouth that allows me to come back. You tell me you are bleeding, and we separate. I can only return to you if you tell me I am permitted to do so."

My mouth is the decider of my sexual status, our sexual status. If I tell my husband I am bleeding, he must respect that. If I decide, as Natalie did in *Tahora*, that I never want to be permitted to him again, my husband can divorce me, but he cannot touch me. The woman alone controls the sexual cycle, she is sole witness and judge.

Long before I married, my father discussed the matter of *nidda* with me. "It is good, Devora," he said. "It creates a rhythm." I held onto his words throughout the years when I kept these incomprehensible laws, trying to find meaning in what I did, but not finding anything except frustration, resentment, tension. But I have cycled in and out of *nidda* for many moons now, and a pattern is forming, of separation and togetherness, space and closeness, and I am the one who declares the beginning and end of each era. I create the rhythm of our sexual life together. It is the rhythm of my life. ■

C. DEVORA HAMMER is an Australian-born writer who currently works in Washington. She writes a column for the Australian newspaper The AJT and has also written for a number of U.S. publications and anthologies.

The Forbidden Era

This streak of a man
Pressed against the next subway door
Blessedly tall, so I can lip-talk to him, above the
mountain-range of heads

He could not come in with me at my subway door
Lest we be pressed against each other by the throng
And we would feel each other's warmth and bodies
In the forbidden nidda era

Centuries, it seems, since I last felt him,
Generations have passed, the world has changed
its course
Since I brushed his lips and he encountered my flesh
It was another incarnation

Today we are lovers of the mind, standing at different
subway doors
Pressed by others' bodies
And across the impenetrable valley of faith, and
discipline, we lip-say
I love you

—C. DEVORA HAMMER

Roadkill

BY MIRIAM SIVAN

First it was hit then thrown forward. Up and quickly down under the car in front before it rolled under mine. I could feel the body hit the chassis. I heard the impact. Driving north, towards Golan, not knowing where I was going, simply going. The border would stop me soon enough. I had to leave. Just that. What, I wasn't sure, though all these were afterthoughts. The first and only compulsion was to get out, to be other than there. That flat was cannibalizing my pain. A baby's waiting bedroom: unhung curtains, an unassembled crib. Six months of expectant life suffocated by a tumor determined to get me next.

* * *

My hands are red with blood. The dog is in my arms. Though no longer alive, at least, I think, technically, she is still bleeding slowly from her mouth, from her skull. She died while I held her, sang to her, and finally closed my fingers over her wind pipe to stop the pain. How quickly she stilled. There is only so much pain that one should be expected to bear.

Cars cruise by me. The drive till-you-drop style Israelis don like a dark cloak, vampires all of them. Baring their teeth, they lean hard against the car in front, taking no prisoners, passing recklessly, hounds for blood. There is the unreality of feeling healthy in a world which is propelled towards decay and death. And there is the unreality of being sick in a world buoyed by the lie of life. I watch the drivers. Some listen to music. Some to the inescapable drone of political blather. Days float by, one becoming another, and there is no way to tell them otherwise.

I am there, not here, sitting on the side of the road, red bloodied hands folded quietly in my lap now, the carcass of a large brown dog beside me, her blood being drunk by the dry ground. No one pauses to see. Or so it seems. No one actually stops. No one wants to hear the story of Ella and the dog run over. Or the one about Ella and her unborn boy. There

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could be lots to tell in the latest chapter of Ella and Gil. But who wants to hear the usual crap about marriage though Ella would like to tell her story. She would like to have someone enclose her in strong arms and assure her—and make her believe—that everything was going to be all right. She would like to try and understand what all right means.

* * *

She should stay home another two weeks, above the mandatory six, after such an operation. And if she needs more, hell, that's fine too, she was told over and over. Her boss and colleagues at the factory, so understanding. The surgeon, straining through his callousness, playing at concern. She knows they are all trying to be extra nice because of the baby. To have a uterus and a dead baby taken out at the very same time is the kind of blow which can elicit the best in people. (Whatever that means. Ella just reads relief on their faces: it's not them.) "And now 6 months of chemotherapy." My voice rises to a quiet croak as I tell the dead dog the forecast. "They hope they got it all, but just to make sure, the poison."

Of course I don't agree with the doctors. I don't necessarily disagree either, but I'm not rushing to having an intravenous drip toxic waters into me, drop by drop, that are not, like anti-missile missiles, sophisticated enough to attack only cancer cells. I watched my father's veins turn black from this stuff. I know all about the headaches, the nausea, the metallic taste in the mouth. Alternatives? Unsure. When I reach the border I might know more.

* * *

Ella had never looked so good, everyone, absolutely everyone kept telling her. Not that she wasn't attractive before, but something lit up in her and like the most time-worn cliche about pregnancy, she glowed. Women on the factory floor made dresses for her, deliberately using fabrics that Ella had designed for that season's fashions. Ella and Gil. High powered, fast living, a fashionable Tel Aviv pair. From their back balcony in the right neighborhood they could see a sliver of sea. Concerts, pubs, regular travels to Europe, Asia, and Africa. Everywhere, Ella sketched and collected. Shapes, colors, fabric swatches. The baby would slow them down, of course. But it was time now.

She had married at 30, had had five years of play with Gil. Time had come to give to the future. A child. A namesake. A kaddish. Yet with one flash of the ultrasound screen, Ella had gone from being a forward looking madonna, doyenne of the fashion world, to a woman cloaked in death. A rapid fire transformation. From shifts to shrouds, hue to tonelessness, foresight to oblivion.

* * *

When I said to Gil, we were sitting in the hospital waiting room after that last ultrasound, that something was very wrong, that it never took so long to read the images of the baby and that I had never before seen three doctors converge around a printout from one of those machines, he said casually (to offset the moan that was beginning to rise in me) that no matter what they found out, I'd survive. He's still eating those words.

I begin to laugh out loud and can't stop for a good minute. The cars garble the sound. My arms wrap around my waist. I feel the blood stickiness on my fingers as they hold on to each other. I hope that glibness stays stuck in his throat forever. "Remember the sequence," this time I include the cars in my hearing audience, and scan the approaching headlights for a bright moment. "The doctors come out, we all go into a little cubby with the main man, he says, the baby is dead, no heartbeat, and there is a tumor the size of a grapefruit lying alongside. They are sharing a bed." Okay, he wasn't so poetic. My words. My body created and killed a baby. Cancer found us both. Him first. I get to sit through another act.

"Gil was green as the doctor's scrubs," I stroke the dog's nuzzle, her black nose is almost dry, "an awful color to use for fabric. Doctor said I needed an immediate hysterectomy followed by chemotherapy. Life expactancy: dependent on how far the cancer's travelled. They 'll see when I'm opened. Been down this road before.— eh, what's up Doc?—something they'll see when I'm opened. Great, I say to the all-knowing, not-knowing doctor, I'm free after lunch." I wanted the baby out of me as soon as possible. I couldn't bear not feeling him kick and roll around and for the first time in the week that I noticed this quiet, know why. And with this episode, would end my short tenure as a mother, and possibly as a living being. Gil, when he finally found himself, started to scowl and went and sat in a corner. I didn't move. The doctor came back to tell me that I would have to return in 4 days and to stop by the nurse's station on my way out for the pre-op instructions.

Drank lots of vodka and orange juice that night, they're called screwdrivers in the States, and waited for them to bore a hole into me. I felt nothing for a little while then. The next day on a cheerier note drank vodka and lemonade. By the

Not that she wasn't attractive before, ...but like the time-worn cliche about pregnancy, she glowed.

third day I was out shopping at the supermarket so Gil would have food in the house while I was in the hospital. I felt better, which was almost unbelievable and I thought, well I can handle this, and went on, stoic and resigned, I guess, couldn't call it exactly hopeful, until this morning, no it began already yesterday. Out of nowhere, I was folding the laundry, warm from the dryer, and then there was nothing in front of me. No images, no senses, no hope, a vast, or even dense, is that possible, emptiness. I knew I had reached the end of possibility. No matter what the official prognosis, and to inject something upbeat into this dank monologue, they, the all important doctors are hopeful and confident that they have "gotten it all," my life is over. Or, at the very least, this life I've been living is over. So how can I have left what no longer exists?

* * *

"Good question." I stroke the dog's long thick fur and feel my legs under her head begin to tingle from the "dead weight of her," I say out loud, as if drunk, my thoughts suddenly transformed into words erupting into the outer world. I thought long and hard about Gil's gun, the one he straps to his leg during the day. It would have to be at night or on a Saturday when he's not at work. Easy enough to go into the dead baby's room to blow my brains out. Messy but efficient. Gil will hire someone to scrub down the walls. But part of me still wants to live, though I can't say why. I certainly don't want to hurt anyone else, though sometimes I wish Gil would go away, very, extremely, permanently. He either denies or submits to his pain—either way, there's no place for me in it.

"The anesthesiologist was held up," I begin to tell the highway the story anyway. Who gives a fuck if it's listening.

I thought long and hard about Gil's gun, the one he straps to his leg during the day. It would have to be at night....

"The operation was scheduled for 10 and it was already noon. First Gil scolded the nurse who had prepped me for not getting the department head involved. Then when he found the doctor he hammered at him, his words relentless and cold, for the hospital's gross insensitivity and mismanagement. And you could understand his point of view." I allow myself a few hand motions to accentuate the narrative. "We had suffered enough already. Delays were unendurable. And the nurse who was replacing my IV bag agreed with him. But, she added, he should keep the anxiety and trouble-shooting to himself. 'Out there,' she spoke firmly and kindly to him, but pointed hard towards the hospital corridor 'not in here. She's going through enough. Here you speak softly, tell her everything'll be all right.' And she stroked the blanket under which I lay quietly. Gil smiled sheepishly, a little boy reprimanded." Oh, it was grand.

* * *

I had no intention of killing this dog today. I am not that out of control. I saw her from a distance. She was standing by the side of the road, head held high, tail alert, like Lassie scanning the horizon for Timmy. I loved that dog and watched her daily on TV. I longed for one of my own. Not a collie necessarily, but a relationship with a loyal and brave dog. When I saw this large brown dog, standing roadside, an overriding anxiety punched at my gut. I always feel this whenever I see a dog near moving cars. Move away, I said aloud. Don't come closer. And then she bounded across the two lane highway, hitting the car in front of me and then rolling under mine.

* * *

When I was seven, my parents gave in and bought my brother and me our own puppy, a small terrier for Manhattan apartment living. Then too silly and small to know better, Toto ran onto the West Side Highway and into a car as if into the arms of a loving child. My father wouldn't let us see the broken body when we went to the A.S.P.C.A. on 92nd Street. He identified Toto's remains and gave me the blue metal tag. My desperate prayers as we rode crosstown to the East River had gone unanswered. There had not been a mistake. Toto was dead. Devastated by this betrayal, though again, not permanently put off, I found myself again praying like hell, begging a phenomenon I had come to call God, to not make this ultrasound reading a tragedy. Unanswered prayers are haunting. The void I hurl my wishes into. Toto. *Todo*.

* * *

I drag the dog's broken body off the shoulder and look for something to dig a grave with. I cannot possibly drive off and leave her to become a diminishing mound of fur and bones in the undignified open. There's already way too much road kill: cats, dogs, foxes, molerats, birds, jackals. I see them daily on my way to work; the slow transformation into dust. The work of the grave displayed. It is taking me a long time with the sharp stone I've chosen for this work, but I don't care. I'm not rushing anywhere. It's already very hot at ten in the morning and I'm panting hard, flushed from exertion, with inertia. The radio announcer may have mentioned a sandstorm from the Sahara. Maybe that's why the day is yellow. I do not hear a car stopping. "I can help you," a voice says to me, and I am surprised at how unsurprised I am. I turn slowly and see a man in an army uniform standing beside his car, trunk popped open, a shovel in his hand.

"Thanks," I say and reach out to take the shovel.

"Rest, and drink some water." He hands me the water bottle in his other hand. "Look how red you are."

I take the water bottle automatically, drink two long sips. Water dribbles down my chin and onto my chest. It cools me a little. I am sweating so much my shirt swaddles me, advertising my distended belly. I sit down in the shade of his car and watch how he methodically digs into the dry earth. With minimal, graceful movements he moves the dirt from the emerging pit to one side. A few moments later, his uniform too is stuck to him and the grave is nearly done. "Here now you rest," I rise and place my hand on the handle of the shovel. I want to finish the job. I need to. But he resists. We look at each other directly for the first time and I see myself vaguely in the reflection of his black eyes. "Please, let me finish. It's important to me." I turn my head slightly, uncomfortable in his steady gaze. But still he resists. I let go, self-conscious and horrified by the image of me in his eyes: mad, flushed frizzy-haired, a sweaty shirt against a swollen form. He wears his stinking shirt so well. He is young and still calm. Eyes like midnight. Hair like cropped wheat. A body that digs graves in minutes, a mouth that might kiss some of the pain away.

I turn abruptly and walk towards his car, murmuring. "Desire. And shame." I'm ill. Withering. More than a decade older than this GI Joe. He's the fucking boy scout helping the old woman cross the street. I walk past his car and along the shoulder's edge, afraid the rage in me will erupt and I'll be vicious when he's trying to be kind.

"You want to help fill?" His voice breaks me.

"Certainly," I say, more shame burning me up. Of course he has seen me speaking to myself. I want to cut at the soft patience in his voice. Am I so pathetic and he so the mitzvah-loving Rambo? Am I the good deed of the day: helping this wacko bury a dog she ran over? With too much gusto I take the shovel and push dirt in over the dog's body. It doesn't thud the way I expect it to. I start at one side and methodically watch as the back, the tail and then the legs, torso, and finally the head are covered with a thin layer of earth. Humbled, my rage subsides some.

"I still expect a reaction from her, a shaking free, a hell what you think you're doing covering me with dirt yowl, you know what I mean. It's that stillness that's awful." I look at him, I can't help myself, I feel the look, the words, they're coming out, I'm erupting and the lava is scorching.

* * *

Where was the baby buried, was it buried, why wouldn't they let me bury him near my father in Jerusalem? Children of the dead, in the Hasidic sections of Jerusalem's cemeteries, are not allowed to stand by the open grave, the man in charge told me and my brother at our father's funeral. So I never got a chance

I can help you," a voice says to me, and I am surprised at how unsurprised I am.

to cover him with dirt, tuck him in for a long good night. And I didn't argue. I didn't want to hear the thud I expected to hear when the dirt hit bottom. Enough that I had seen the body being lowered. Which is why they wouldn't let me see the baby. Drugged me and told Gil, too traumatic. But even on my morphine cloud I screamed that I wanted to see him.

* * *

"I helped bury my best friend last month," the young man says. I think I see tears rim his eyes. Saccharine cliches molest me. But his eyes do look like dark pools I want to swim in. "He was killed near the Lebanese border on a day when they gave me leave. Just for twenty-four hours. And I was supposed to be with him that day." He stares down at the covered dog.

"I know that supposed to." He takes the shovel from me and in a few deliberate strokes, furious and grievous, finishes with the grave. He throws the shovel into the car and slams the trunk closed.

"Now what?" he asks me.

"What do you mean what?" I can not imagine what more there is.

"We're both soaked, stinking, and I can't just bury a dog with someone and say good-bye."

"Why not?" I say, feeling the lava lap at my mouth and I have to laugh at it. "I just buried a baby and said good-bye to a husband." I begin to laugh harder. I even burst out with laughter. I am not crazy, not yet, and the pain is stalking me. And I can't cry. He looks at me, shocked is it? "You serious? You're not pregnant? So casual about it, God, what's wrong with you then?"

"Hell, I'm going to die. We all are, to let you in on a little secret that was just broadcast to me on my own private cosmic earphones. Anyway, who asked you to stop....and help and who knows what the fuck you expect from me now and what you think we just did beyond bury an ugly dog that was stupid enough to run into the middle of the road with tons of metal

flying in her direction at 120 kilometers an hour." I want to hit this man, I want to bite him, piss on him, and fuck him. I run into my car and start the engine. He follows, looking like some shit-kicking cop in Mississippi (I have been on too many Southern back roads to resist the temptation of this image). He places his hands on the open window.

"I want you to follow me. I'm going to turn left at the next intersection and then right, towards the beach."

He is missing the mirrored sun glasses, but I see myself when I look at him anyway. He backs away slowly and I notice how the crease in his fatigues is gone, the dark boots dull, the belt on his hips slung a bit too low. When he starts driving, I follow, a metal shard directed by a magnet.We drive in procession, slowly, cautiously, past Nahariya's one light intersection and on to a small road along the beach. He turns off to Achziv and I realize I don't have to continue but do anyway. I pull up next to him in the empty parking area. I don't know what I am doing, but I haven't known that for days already.

Maybe this is my last tango, and no names is a crucial element. No biography. No words.

He comes out of the car wearing a clean tee shirt and I can't not notice how beautiful he is. Am I so old to be longing for youth this way? Probably not at thirty-five, but I am bloated like an aged crone, and feel bitter and brittle. Just missing a few warts, the cackle's already begun.

"Let's go to the water," he says taking my elbow and guiding me over the rocks and the sand. I am limp and tense and don't know how else to understand the strain and longing for oblivion engulfing me. The sea is so clear it is unsettling. The sand ripples symmetrically on the bottom. The water takes me and I keep walking. My clothes pull away and fill with water which eddies around me, chilly and light. Not to drown, but to feel my smallness in each wave. I lay on my back and float like my grandmother, lulled by the waves during an acute attack of pain, only her heart broke, the springs popped, and it was over. Mine breaks with each moment, again and again, with every breath. I think of lying her face up to the sun in the water at Gordon beach, in Tel Aviv, the lifeguard watching her morph into inanimation. This is the same water, the same shore line 150 kilometers north. In many other places in the world, this distance wouldn't be the other end of the country, but considered the same beach. And for me, raised with the Eastern Seaboard as a reference, it is the same beach.

* * *

My baby died in salt water. My grandmother died in salt water. It is good enough for me. I feel I am drifting quickly and it takes a moment to realize the man is pulling me to shore by my heel. I do not resist. I don't care to live but I can't deny his need to rescue. When I feel the sand against my shoulders, I sit up briefly. The beach is empty, mid-week in May, and like always, is magnificent. The gravelly sand runs up to the Phoenician ruins, that forgotten port of call. At the water line, and for the first time in weeks, I lie on my stomach. He sits beside me. What's there to say? Mercifully he knows this. He begins to untangle my hair, to lift it from my neck where it has become knotted in the thick rubber band. His hands are cool and clever and I wonder if he is a medic. But I won't ask. I don't want to know. Maybe this is my last tango, and no names is a crucial element. No biography. No words, just one body with the other, giving form to pain. Have I already ruined it by telling him about the baby? But I was vague enough about the cancer and didn't mention Gil by name.

* * *

I roll over on my back. The man lifts his hands and places them quietly in his lap. "Where was your friend from?" I ask.

"You wouldn't know him," he answers matter of factly. "You're not from here."

I want to protest, but don't have the energy to. I am from here, just not originally. I sat, gas mask ready, in my sealed room during the Gulf War. I say good-bye twice a year to a husband who still has an active reserve duty. I am at the same risk as everyone else that the next bomb will go off near me, on the bus, in a cafe. I was hoping to bring a baby boy into this world, my destiny bound to that of the place.

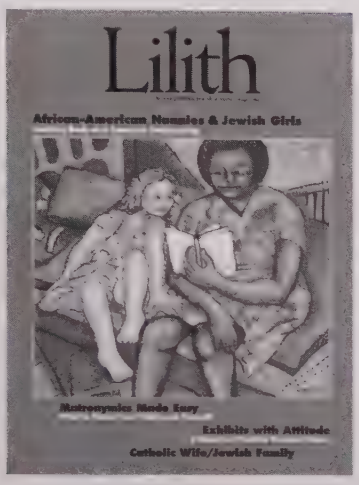
I watch the cloudless sky move. Bands of blue headed in the same direction. "You know," I sit up, "about the submarines that patrol the coast? Soldiers know things like that." I notice that his dog tags have fallen to the side. I wonder if they are hot like the sand. I want to lift them and do after a moment. Like a blind person my fingertips feel the letters in relief. I will not look at his name. He tugs at my hand and I lay back down beside him. Not touching. Not not touching. I can feel when he begins to cry. Hesitantly, but not quietly. I put my arms around him and despite the anguish suffocating me, know this man, fifteen years my junior, this boy really, still needs to feel there is something worth breathing for. I hold him closer, rock him, and like a puppy he nuzzles his head into my neck. I hold him even tighter and lick tears from the corners of his eyes.

"I'm going to the border," I whisper. "I'm going until I'm stopped."

"Don't stop," he breathes out and covers my mouth with his. I am lost, I am found, I am falling into warmth. He reaches under me and wraps my legs around him. This is not a prelude to penetration. This is bind me, this is shield me. I squeeze as hard as I can, wondering if the periscope of a submarine has us in the viewfinder, and with fingers desperate to enclose, grasp his metal dog tags. I cover his name with my fist and his mouth with mine. His tears don't stop. "Don't stop," I breathe out, "don't stop," and he wets us with loss, we are lost in the salt water of beginnings, of ends. I open my shirt so he can suckle, a mother's son on his way to battle. ■

MIRIAM SIVAN, originally a New Yorker, lives in the Galilee and teaches at the University of Haifa. She has published short stories and a translation of Leah Goldberg's book of poems, *On the Blossoming*. Her novel, *The Heights*, was nominated for the Pushcard Award.

Readers Respond



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JEWISH GIRLS & AFRICAN-AMERICAN NANNIES

I cannot tell you how the article on Jewish girls and African-American Nannies [Winter 2002-2003] affected me. All my feelings about "my Lucy" were expressed. My only regret is that I did not know until only a few years ago that Lucy did not know how to read and write. How could I not have known? When she died last year, her friend called me and told me that she was surrounded by pictures of my children and grandchildren. My own guilt, over having her with me when her own children and grandchildren did not, was lessened when in her eulogy it was stated that her happiest years were those when she lived with us. Those of us that had the privilege of those wonderful women in our lives have truly been blessed.

BARBARA RUCKET
ATLANTA, GA

"African-American Nannies and Jewish Girls" was rich. Thank you for having the courage to really look at how we live and give voice to so many unspoken and unexamined issues. Your articles are always relevant to what's going on in the world and what's going on in me.

I can see the wide and varied uses of your message for the summer camp where I am a nurse, my temple Sisterhood, the same temple's adult education, and post-confirmation programming, and my college-aged son.

LISA JABLON
BALTIMORE, MD

NAMING OURSELVES

My name is Karen Libman; my husband's name is Mitch Kachun, and we are the proud parents of Michelle (13) and Silas (9) Kachman, their last name a combination of their parents' last names. To me, their name reflects who they are—a combination of both of us.

I have never understood why women—smart, funny, feminist women—agree to give their male partner's name to their children, even while keeping their own. Our resolution to the naming issue is, for my entire family, one we really agree on and that gives us continuous pleasure.

KAREN LIBMAN
ALLENDALE, MI

My husband and I have observed Jewish religious traditions in a way that incorporates our moral values about daily life and feminism.

After reading Debra Rubin's article "A Paradox of Jewish Inheritance" [Winter 2002-03], referring to her brother's *pidyon ha'ben,* I wanted to share the decision my husband and I made when our daughter was born. We wanted to honor our firstborn in traditional Jewish terms, with the same reverence we would have accorded a son. At her naming and with our rabbi, we performed a *pidyon ha'bat.* We want her to come up in the world knowing that she is a Jew, a human being, and equal. Period.

ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ
NEW YORK, NY

Debra Rubin's mother didn't have to "take it upon herself to decide" that she need not have a *pidyon ha'ben* for her firstborn male child. According to halacha, the daughters as well as the sons of *kohanim* and *levi'im* (married to Israelites) don't have to redeem their first born It doesn't make her brother a kohen, though, at least not according to the halakha.

At the Newton Center Minyan we are egalitarian in gender matters—women are full liturgical participants—but not in matters of status. So we still call up *Kohen, Levi, Yisrael aliyot* and offer them to both men and women. A woman who is the daughter of a Kohen or Levi father is called up as "so-and-so, daughter of [father's name and mother's name], bat Kohen/Levi". Note, "bat Kohen," not "Kohen." By our reckoning, this status passes through the male line—as Jewish identity passes through the maternal line—so she is not a Kohen and doesn't pass the status on to her children if she marries a Yisrael.

SHERRY ISRAEL
WALTHAM, MA

ABUSE

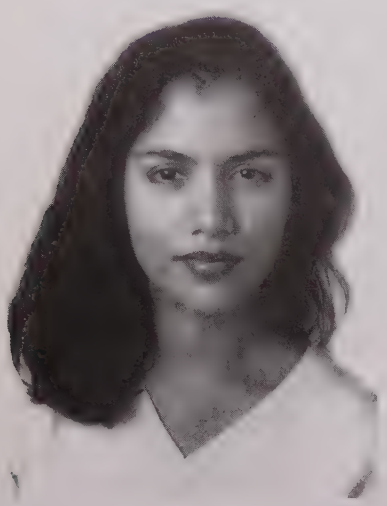
Sue William Silverman asks, in "Praying for Protection" [Winter 2002-2003], whether abused Catholic children dreamed of safety in temples, I'd say "yes, I did." I am a survivor of clergy sexual abuse by Catholic priests, and am now Jewish. I told my rabbi that I could now be around priests and even have normal conversations with them without having panic attacks. He observed this was probably because they no longer had any power over me.

I am of Irish/German Catholic background. It took me a while to acclimate to Judaism, but now I am the program director and rabbinic aide at my congregation and run Jewish Family Services. Three out of my four kids converted, also, and the oldest one (who did not convert) works with me at the synagogue. We run the place.

REGINA WURST
FRESNO, CA

A Grandmother's Secrets

Burnt Bread and Chutney: A Memoir of an Indian Jewish Girl, by Carmit Delman, Ballantine Books, $22.95; Random House,' $13.95



Indian-American culture clashes—and the Jewish girl caught in the middle

Carmit Delman's first encounter with a hot dog was fraught. Sighting at a neighbor's picnic in her suburban American town the "piles of food [that] seemed to glisten before me with mayonnaise and meatiness," she crept through the fence and was given one of her own. She returned with it to her kitchen, where her Indian Jewish grandmother, Nana-bai, "[using] the spatula...poked suspiciously at the hot dog in question," declared that it was "not real food," and went back to cooking her curry. Delman, meanwhile, wondered what her grandmother could mean, imagined her hot dog "opening a thousand eyes," and then wolfed it down anyway.

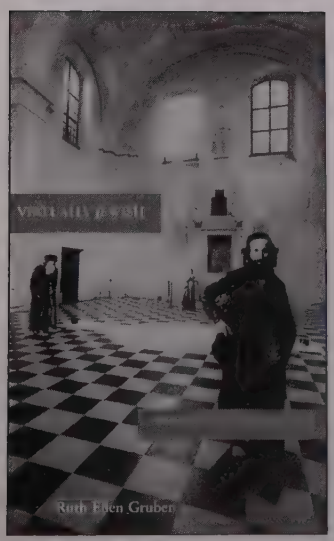
And so the rituals of cultural isolation, assimilation, deference and defiance are set out in Delman's modest but engaging coming-of-age memoir, *Burnt Bread and Chutney.* The child of an Ashkenazic father and an Indian Jewish mother, and the grandchild of a very present Indian grandmother, Delman explores the many ways in which she and her family struggle to find a home for themselves in suburban America. The isolations are various: poverty amidst wealth, immigrants among Americans, Old-World values among New, dark-skinned Mizrahi Jews among white Ashkenazim.

These culture clashes are poignant, painful, and often funny as well: Too poor for other food, they eat spaghetti drowned in ketchup donated by fellow synagogue goers. Scraping together money for her 11th birthday party, her parents serve "Price Chopper Corn Chips" and rent the humiliatingly childish video "The Yearling" for entertainment. Hunting for rebellion, a 13-year-old Delman discovers the rock band KISS and begins, incongruous though it was in her deeply sheltered family, to wear "high teased hair and dark eye makeup and lipstick."

But the real intrigue of Delman's story is not her own growing-up angst, but her retelling of her grandmother's history as she uncovers it, bit by bit, while growing up, and the ways in which that history has led to her family's isolation even within the extended Indian family itself. This is uncomfortable and shocking history even for the reader to discover: arranged marriages, competition between sisters for the same man, Nana-bai's abusive husband. It is Nana-bai's humiliation at the hands of her older sister, her small acts of defiance—claiming, for instance, a ripe mango for her daughter—and her ultimate escape. It is also the story of how there is no escape, either from her values (Nana-bai chides the young Delman for combing her hair outside, threatening that she'll be a "spoiled" woman) or from the family shame—I won't give away the sad secret here—that she endured, even after her death.

Being female in all of this is, of course, the primary liability. Nana-bai, married off by her parents to a wretched man, suffers greatly before her escape. And yet she cannot help but impose the traditional gender hierarchy on her grandchildren. In the scene that gives this book its title, Nana-bai burns a bit of chapati she's been cooking. "It's certainly not fine enough to put on the table for your brother and father," she tells the young Delman. But then she scrapes off the blackened parts, spreads the bread with butter and chutney, and shares it with Delman. "Wordless and distrustful, ..." Delman recalls, "I ate it, and I was pleased to find that it was good." It is this mix of deference and rebellion that makes Delman's story worth reading. She has not analyzed her history deeply, but she has told it well, and in the end we cannot help but understand that her impulses toward modernization and sentimentality, toward integration and isolation, are the dynamic that will continue in Delman and even, though ever-lessening, for generations.

—SARAH BLUSTAIN



Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe, by Ruth Ellen Gruber, University of California Press, 2002, $35

Visiting Warsaw in 1990 shortly after the collapse of Poland's communist system, I occasionally noticed Nazi swastikas or Stars of David slashed with black paint on public buildings and slogans like "Jews, back to Israel". What accounted for the anti-Semitic graffiti, when there were virtually no Jews living in Poland at the end of the Cold War era? "You don't need Jews for anti-Semitism to flourish," Polish friends explained.

By the mid-90s Jewish cultural activity by non-Jews in Europe—from museum exhibits

and synagogue renovations, to heritage tours and commercial kitsch—were in vogue. The irony was understood much like the anti-Semitic graffiti: "You don't need Jews for there to be a renewal of Jewish culture in Europe."

But is it Jewish culture or *cultural product*? Can we trust it? Whom does it serve? How did it develop? And is it ultimately good for the Jews who still live in Europe? Such questions form the heart of this important study by Ruth Ellen Gruber, European correspondent for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Since the Cold War's end, nations across Europe have been confronting their Holocaust histories. Regardless of whether they were predominantly perpetrators, victims or bystanders during the Second World War, the reckoning has generated both a cultural renaissance and a new marketplace offering a smorgasbord of commercial attractions: Jewish-style cafes and restaurants (serving tsimes and kugel alongside schnitzel and goulash), Yiddish theater performances, Klezmer concerts, gift shops, posters, books, CDs and tapes, Magen David tattoos, kosher vodka, and history museums. Located in prewar Jewish spaces such as ghettos and synagogues, the cultural markets make up a "virtual Jewish world," says Gruber.

[T]he resulting collective vision is quite frequently the product of literary imagination—'Jewish style' rather than Jewish," Gruber writes. "Jewish cultural products may take precedence over living Jewish culture: a realm in many senses constructed from desire rather than from memory or inherited tradition. Jewish thus can become a label with a life of its own."

Gruber suggests that virtual Judaism allows Europeans to atone for the Holocaust, redefine their national histories, and/or posit a multiethnic ideal in their clearly monoethnic cultures. In what ways, if any, does this "virtual" Judaism help real Jews?

"This Gentile Jewish culture is shaping the perception of what is Jewish. And it has one huge asset that no Jewish culture ever had—it's so easy," Konstanty Gebert, a Polish Jewish community leader, told Gruber. "To participate in Jewish culture took an effort. You had to be educated, culturally educated, religiously, secularly, whatever. And here you get the equivalent of McDonald's."

No true Jewish legacy remains in Europe, says Gruber, and it is highly unlikely that authentic Jewish values can "counter the torrent of popular artifice wherever Jews already feel ambiguity about their identities and are uneasy about their roles both as Jews and as full-fledged members of general society. For Jews and non-Jews alike, buying a book or theater ticket is easier than mastering the liturgy or language."

But isn't this ambivalence, which Gruber describes, similarly experienced by American Jews? No, she says, and reminds us of a crucial difference between European and Ameican Jewry: "For American Jews, it is a cultural and religious heritage that was lost primarily through immigrant assimilation into American society rather than through the destruction of the Holocaust." A truer comparison exists between European Jewry and Native Americans. After all, how different are the carved wooden figures of bearded, tallit-draped rabbis that line gift shop shelves in the Warsaw and Krakow airports from the Navajo-style, clay models of teepees and "squaws" on display in airport shops in Phoenix, Denver and Albuquerque?

—SHANA PENN

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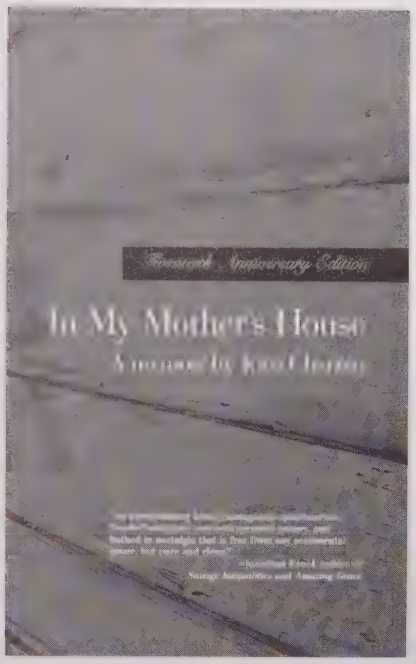

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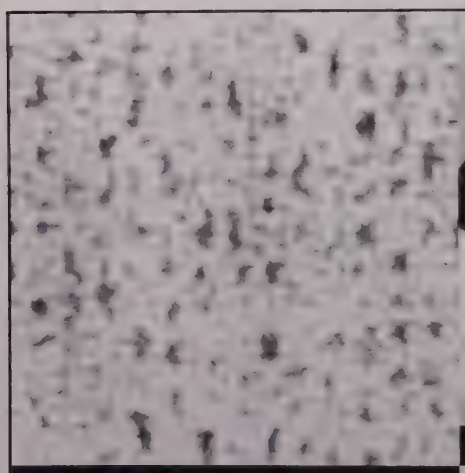

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Women of the Wall: Claiming Sacred Ground at Judaism's Holy Site, edited by Phyllis Chesler and Rivka Haut, Jewish Lights, $34.95

Attendees at an international conference in Jerusalem approached the Kotel (Western Wall) with a Torah scroll one December morning in 1988 to hold a women's prayer service. The abuse and violence that followed have brought to the forefront issues of women's equality within Judaism.

Women of the Wall includes analysis and reminiscences from dozens of women who were there, and many who still continue to pray together each Rosh Hodesh (new moon) in Jerusalem. Here we have a comprehensive history of this vital but marginalized group of women. This anthology provides insight into the workings of the Israeli Supreme Court (which has still not granted women their full rights to pray as they wish), the rabbinate, and the minds of secular and religious Jews in Israel and America.

Israel has no separation of "church" and state; thus Orthodox rabbinic councils hold real political power. The women have sparked hostile reactions because their presence at the Wall, wearing *tallitot* and carrying a Torah scroll, forces a confrontation with the discrimination inherent in traditional Jewish practice. Reform and Conservative Judaism have long fought for an equal footing in Israel, where most Jews define themselves as either *dati* (Orthodox) or *hiloni* (secular). While in actual observance many Israelis may fall somewhere between the two, identification with liberal denominations has not yet caught on, and "*Reformim*" are identified with Americans. *Women of the Wall* provides an understanding of how religion is viewed in Israel, and why most Israelis cannot understand the desire of women to pray aloud, in a group, while wearing a *tallit*. According to most Israelis, these are things that Orthodox men do, and if the women are Orthodox, why do they not observe Orthodox traditions and pray silently and alone? If the women are Reform, why do they wish to pray at the Wall, a largely Orthodox enclave, and in an Orthodox fashion? The concept of transforming Judaism itself poses a threat to many in the religious establishment, and is deemed irrelevant by those outside of it.

In her essay, Rivka Haut, a founding member of the group, summarizes: "We merely sought to establish that the prayers of women are equally important and desirable before God as are the prayers of men." The Women of the Wall pray as a *halakhic* group, which means that they follow Orthodox practice in their manner of worship. The objections of the ruling rabbis are not that these women are violating Jewish law, but Jewish custom. And it is exactly the custom of exclusion and discrimination that the women wish to change. The women return, month after month, determined to continue the struggle. —REBECCA SCHWARTZ

Hot Chocolate at Hanselmann's

By Rosetta Loy
Translated and with an introduction by Gregory Conti

A work of understated elegance and cumulative power, this novel eases readers into a drama unfolding within a Catholic family in Italy on the eve of World War II. As scenes only dimly understood by the child Lorenza are revisited by the woman she becomes, what seemed a family affair—a romance involving Lorenza's mother, her father's Jewish friend Arturo, and her aunt Margot in Switzerland—begins to reveal the broader outlines of the drama of history, in particular the tragedy of Italy's Jews during the Holocaust. Limning the interplay of past and present, of memory and presence, this haunting work by one of Italy's foremost writers brings to life the subtleties and complexities of history as it is experienced, interpreted, and relived within the most intimate of realms.
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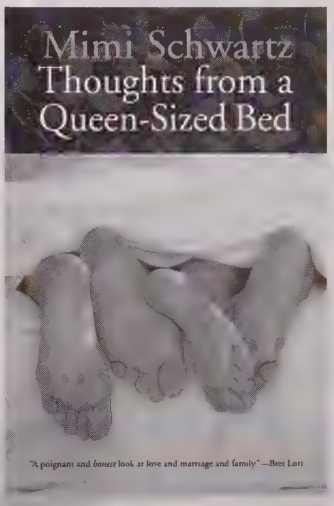

Thoughts from a Queen-Sized Bed

By Mimi Schwartz

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A Mouthful of Air, by Amy Koppelman, MacAdam/Cage, $23

There are two sets of fresh scars in Amy Koppleman's audacious debut novel, *A Mouthful of Air.* Julie Davis has slit her wrists around the same time as her mother, Harriet, has had a facelift. One of these privileged women is a survivor, the other a perpetual self-doubter.

Julie is a young woman who sleepwalked into the life prescribed for her. Blessed with the physical attractiveness that can shield select women from harm, from too much exposure to the struggles of those who make their own way, she has effortlessly acquired a successful husband—an unfailingly decent, if conventional man—a little boy, a baby girl. Both husband and wife have bought what they've presumably been sold throughout their lives, all the trimmings of their social class. Yet Julie is absent from her own life. Most of her time is spent living as an impostor. Day by day, hour by hour, she remains a witness to her own search for authentic emotion.

The novel opens a few weeks after Julie has slit her wrists, discovered in the bathtub by her housekeeper, her daughter Rachel yet to be born. We come to know Julie during the mending process from this suicide attempt.

Koppleman tells Julie's story in a spare, staccato prose, a rhythm that seems to keep pace with her heroine's methodical efforts to achieve wholeness. Koppleman gestures to possible causes for Julie's profound depression, but she understands the etiology of this illness does not reside in circumstance. She tells an ultimately harrowing story, but guides it with restraint and honesty, and no small amount of courage. —PATTY GROSSMAN

Like a Bride and ***Like a Mother,*** by Rosa Nissan, translated by Dick Gerdes, introduction by Ilan Stavans, University of New Mexico Press, $24.95

This is an unfamiliar familiar story. The familiar part: a young woman grows up in a traditional family. She longs to break away, to study, to explore. But she must marry early, have bundles of children, keep house. She finally rebels, divorces, and after much anguish finds the human and professional fulfillment she craves.

The unfamiliar part: Oshinica Mataraso is a Mexican Sephardi, and the coming-of-age novel brims with the sounds of Ladino, the lilting tongue of the Jews exiled from Spain.

Oshinica belongs to a triple minority—Jewish in a Catholic country, Sephardic in a largely Ashkenzic community, female in a *machista* society. The twin novels—*Like a Bride* and its sequel, *Like a Mother*—recount how she negotiates these multiple otherings with humor and joie de vivre. From childhood when her Catholic classmates accuse her of killing Jesus, to wifehood when her Jewish husband accuses her of killing their marriage, Oshinica fights the system, ultimately achieving liberation through art.

Her weapons are bloodless but potent—images and words. A photography apprenticeship reveals a world both beautiful and practical; Oshinica learns that she can create art and earn a living as a photographer. And one of Mexico's literary grand dames, Elena Poniatowska, teaches her how to transform her diffuse and self-conscious scribbling into the novels we are reading. The demure teenage bride expected only to beget babies (preferably sons) surprises everyone as she engenders imaginary creatures, and defiantly declares: "I only want to do what my desires tell me to do."

Like a Bride and *Like a Mother* are based on author Rosa Nissán's own life. The first novel, *Novia que te vea* was received well when the Spanish original appeared in 1992; it was made into a successful movie by another Mexican-Jewish woman, director Guita Shyfter. The second novel, *Hisho que te nazca* in Spanish (1996), takes up Oshinica's bittersweet saga as a wife and mother, divorcee and professional. Nissan's loving, if critical, recreation of a disappearing Sephardic world uses pungent Ladino anecdotes, dialogue and verses peppering the standard Spanish text; the two books' very titles are deliciously Judeo-Spanish, in a literal translation: "A bride may [I live] to see you," "A boy may you give birth to."

Nissán doesn't reduce Ladino to quaint folkloric window dressing. When Elena criticizes Oshinica for writing her sentences "backwards," with the verb at the end of the sentence, Ladino-style, as in the novels' titles, the once-meek apprentice doesn't hesitate to defy her literary mentor: "I defend myself when it absolutely has to be said a certain way…because that's the way I heard it said at home. That's the way Ladino is." That's the way Ladino is, that's the way she is—independent, Jewish Sephardic, Mexican, female. No one, not even a respected Mexican feminist intellectual guru, can take that away from her.

—EDNA AIZENBERG

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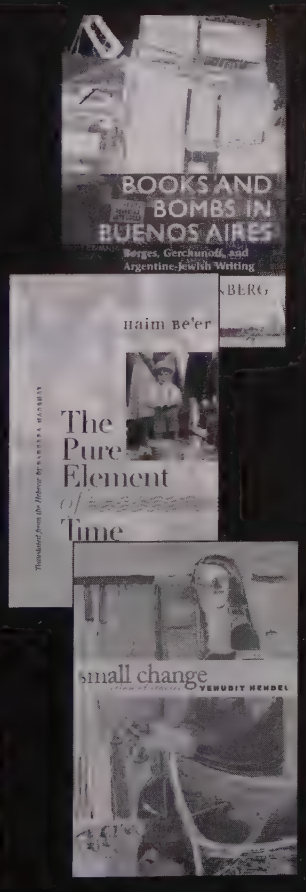

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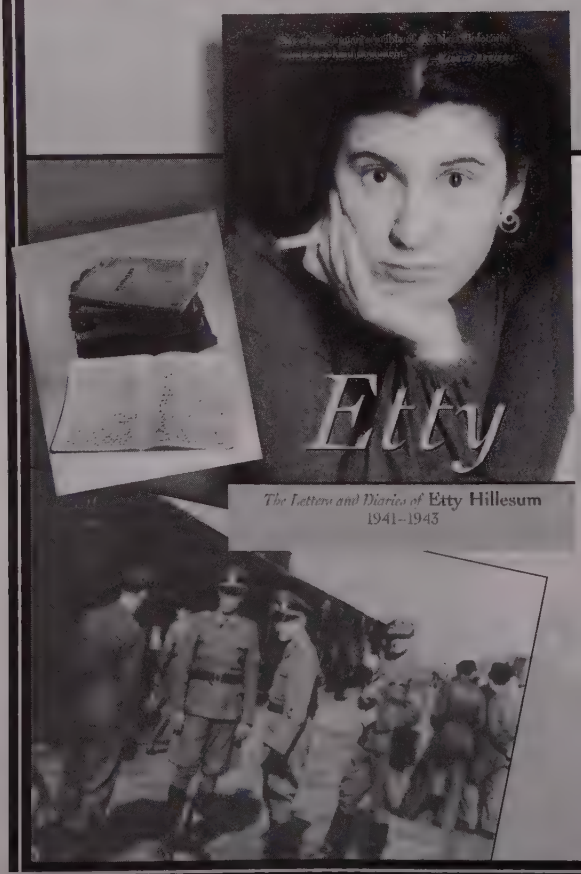

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Reading the Women of the Bible, by Tikva Frymer-Kensky, Schocken Books, $28.95

In this book, which just received the Koret Prize, Frymer-Kensky provides a socio-historical interpretation, dissecting a sentence of biblical text word by word and then discussing the broader political situation behind the classic stories, including comparisons from surrounding Near Eastern cultures.

For example, Genesis describes Rebekah as a beautiful virgin, kind enough to offer to draw water for Abraham's servant Eliezer and his camels. Frymer-Kensky observes that a camel holds a great deal of water, especially after a long desert journey, and additionally that "(a)ncient Near Eastern wells were not vertical shafts through which buckets are lowered by rope. They were inclined slopes that the girl went down and came up. To water ten camels after a long journey, Rivkah had to go down and come up many times." We now see that the matriarch Rebekah was more than beautiful—she was physically strong and observed the code of hospitality above and beyond the call of duty. Such attention to detail helps us to read these stories as ancient listeners heard them.

Frymer-Kensky uses four categories to describe the types of women in the bible: victors, victims, virgins (or brides) and voices (wise women or oracles). The victor stories are "tales about heroic women who become saviors, helping Israel survive and defeat its enemies." The victims appear in "texts of terror" whose purpose is primarily to serve as social and political commentary. The female oracles represent the voice of God at different points in Israel's history, "making a powerful statement about how the marginalized can be chosen to convey the word." Finally, the virgin stories, concern "marriage, intermarriage, ethnicity, and boundaries with non-Israelites."

Frymer-Kensky notes the absence of "negative statements and stereotypes about women, no gynophobic discourse....On the one hand, women occupied a socially subordinate position. One the other hand, the Bible did not label them as inferior." The Bible, she claims, is not a misogynist book per se, and yet it never questions the secondary status of women, accepting it much as biblical civilization accepted slavery, war and pestilence as unchangeable facts of life.

She notes that much of the imagery of the "sexual temptress" or "dangerous woman" comes from later, Greek, interpretations of the biblical tales. Indeed, the stories most problematic for feminists exist not as morality tales of how men and women should be, but as social critiques and warnings.

Frymer-Kensky's scholarship is thorough and exemplary, yet the book is accessible, possibly the best and most comprehensive introduction for lay readers to women in the Bible. —R.S.

The Woman Who Laughed at God: The Untold History of the Jewish People, by Jonathan Kirsch, Viking Books, $24.95

If His behavior in the Bible is any indication, God would seem to suffer from multiple personality disorder. When He promises the nonagenarian Sarah a child, and she laughs at Him, He fairly pouts, wondering, "Why did Sarah laugh?" Can this be the same mighty deity who incites awe and demolishes cities? To Jonathan Kirsch, these clashing characterizations of God embody—and augur—the richly heterogeneous fabric of Judaism. We say contradiction, he says countertradition.

From the eclectic authorship of the Torah, to today's "six million Judaisms" for six million American Jews, Kirsch shows how the warp of tradition and the weft of countertradition are continuously woven into Judaism's never-completed tapestry. In his judgment, a meditating "BuJew" is as Jewish as a peyot-coiffed Hasid, if not, he winkingly suggests, more so, since the BuJew embraces the spirit of innovation so crucial to Judaism. Then again, the Orthodox also play a key role, by adding to Judaism's trademark diversity, and by manifesting, unwittingly or not, some of its iconoclastic ingenuity. Classical Judaism itself, a "portable" faith that can be practiced wherever there are ten male Jews, was once a revolutionary invention, improvised in the wake of the Temple's destruction.

In this fascinating, gracefully written jaunt through Jewish history, Kirsch discusses Judaism's pagan-tinged roots, the mystical practices of the Kabbalah, and the legacy of the "fighting Jew." A chapter on the feminist countertradition honors the figure of Lilith, who, after ditching Adam, was

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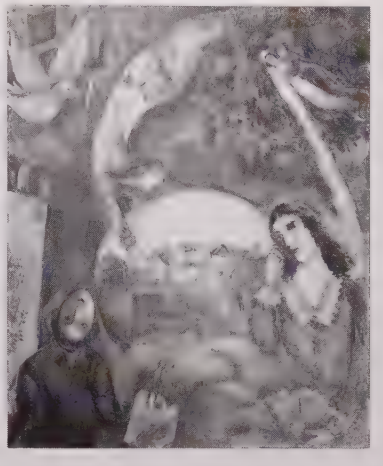

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doomed to an eternity of bearing children and watching them die. Once a versatile scapegoat, blamed for everything from wet dreams to miscarriages, Lilith now "comes full circle in our own era as an icon of autonomy and self-expression among Jewish women," for example, as Kirsch notes, in *Lilith* Magazine. The book is infused with the author's pluralist polemic, and if he repeats his point one too many times, he repays the tolerant reader by illustrating that point so beautifully.

REBECCA TUHUS-DUBROW

Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century,
by Betsy Israel, Morrow, $24.95

For some unlucky generations, spinsterhood, with its high economic price and nasty stigma, was regarded as a fate worse than death. (Bachelorhood, meanwhile, has rarely meant a fate worse than takeout.) In this popular history of the single woman, Betsy Israel offers an engaging compendium of material from the media and entertainment, academic studies, diaries, and interviews, all stitched together with her breezy prose.

Despite the enticing promise of the subtitle, *Bachelor Girl* tells the opposite of secrets. The central motif is mainstream culture's changing image of single women, spanning the toothless old maid, the flapper, the Gibson Girl, and Bridget Jones. This focus on media iconography, as Israel acknowledges, limits her study largely to straight, white New Yorkers. It's as though she cast a wide-meshed net into her unruly subject, turning up only the easiest, albeit savory, catch.

If the single life once guaranteed hardship, marriage did not necessarily offer a tempting alternative. In the 1870s, frequent deaths in childbirth, bossy husbands, and debilitating housework sent many women, especially educated ones, running from the aisle. In the 1902 edition of *Who's Who*, 53.3% of the featured women vowed never to marry, viewing it as a "profound disincentive" to serious work. Israel documents the rocky courtship between women and the workplace, in which women were wooed en masse into previously unavailable occupations during World War II, only to be jilted upon the men's return.

Much has changed since the days, in the late 1800s, when the Massachusetts governor proposed exporting the state's single women to the frontier. But one constant in the single woman's evolution is the threat she poses, much more subtly today than in the past. One woman, writing in the *Times*, expressed with perfect pitch the understated uneasiness she arouses: "There's something about a woman standing alone. People wonder what she wants."—R. T-D.

Foiled: Hilter's Jewish Olympian
by Milly Mogulof, RDR Books, $17.95

Elite athletes are notoriously bad role models, much as we wish otherwise. We would like to believe that superb athletes are super people. How else can we justify all the hours we spend watching them, the huge salaries, the hero worship? But top athletes tend to wear blinders. It is a rare athlete who responds when history comes calling: Muhammad Ali who went to jail rather than fight in Vietnam; Billie Jean King who led a boycott to protest women's second-class status.

This is the context for considering the life of Helene Mayer, one of the greatest fencers. Born near Frankfurt in 1910 to a German-Jewish father and German mother, Mayer enjoyed, perhaps too much, her stature as Germany's golden girl after winning an Olympic gold medal in 1926 at the age of 18. *Foiled*, a fascinating new biography of Mayer, is a story about an athlete who was unable to take off the blinders.

Mayer was stranded in California in the 1930s, when the Nazis began hacking away at the rights of people with Jewish blood. She was granted haven by Mills College, where she taught and trained. She was, however, more interested in parlaying her athletic celebrity and Teutonic good looks into party invites rather than, for example, giving a helping hand to the fledgling Olympic boycott movement in the U.S. The crux of the biography is a twisted tale about Mayer's being used as a pawn, with her consent, in a cynical international effort to pretend that Hitler's Germany did not discriminate against Jews—this on the eve of the Holocaust.

The stomach-turning story of the 1936 Olympics in Berlin is powerful material, and Mogulof runs with it. The inclusion of American sprinter Helen Stephens' tale about Nazi debauchery at post-Games parties is chilling. Overall, though, Mogulof leaves the sports lover wanting more, well, sports. As the winner of an astounding eight consecutive U.S. fencing titles (1939-1946), Mayer, in *Foiled*, is denied the honor of having at least one of her fencing bouts described with the kind of detail that gives the reader a sense of her athletic genius. But this book gets the reader's blood pumping in other ways. —JANE GOTTESMAN ■

Our Reviewers:

EDNA AIZENBERG is Professor and Chair of Spanish at Marymount Manhattan College, and a critic of Latin American Jewish literature. Her new book is *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires: Borges, Gerchunoff and Argentine-Jewish Writing*.

SARAH BLUSTAIN is Managing Editor of The New Republic and a LILITH Contributing Editor.

JANE GOTTESMAN created and co-curated the *Game Face: What Does a Female Athlete Look Like?* photography exhibition and book project.

PATRICIA GROSSMAN is the author of three novels; the most recent is *Unexpected Child* (Alyson Books, 2000).

HELEN SCHARY MOTRO, an American lawyer and writer living in Israel, is a columnist for The Jerusalem Post. Her work appears frequently in the Ameircan press.

SHANA PENN, a LILITH Contributing Editor, is the author of *National Secret: The Women Who Brought Democracy to Poland* (University of Michigan Press, forthcoming).

REBECCA SCHWARTZ is editor of *All the Women Followed Her: A Collection of Writings on Miriam the Prophet and the Women of Exodus* (2001). She holds an MA in Jewish History and teaches in the San Francisco Bay Area.

REBECCA TUHUS-DUBROW is a teacher and writer living in Brooklyn.

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CARING COMMUNITIES

Power and Responsibility: The 3rd European Jewish Conference of Women Rabbis, Community Politicians, Activists and Scholars will take place in Berlin, May 22-25. *(030) 42 08 53 30; bet-debora@hagalil.com*

Religious and left-leaning? A list is designed for people who are traditionally Jewishly observant (whether you identify as Orthodox, Conservative, or something else) and "very, very, very, left-wing socially, politically, etc." The invitation announces that "queers, transfolk of every stripe, and Jews of every/any racial background are welcome." *religiousleftyjews-subscribe @yahoogroups.com*

A neighbor's independence might depend on you. Faith in Action connects volunteers from different faith communities with neighbors who need assistance with long term health needs in their homes with the additional goal of nurturing coalitions of interfaith communities. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation makes technical assistance and mentoring available to participating synagogues or churches from the Wake Forest University School of Medicine, *www.FIAVolunteers.org; (877)324-8411.*

"Lev v'Neshama" (Heart and Soul). In Tzfat, a city of 22,000 in Israel's Galil, three volunteers—Rena Cohen, Yaffa Smolensky, and Faga Weiss—have organized to help needy residents relieve the pressure of grocery store debts, providing vouchers for food and opening a "discount store" to help families stretch their budgets. They remind potential supporters that there are no food shortages in Israel; just a shortage of cash. Donations—checks payable to PEF—can be sent to the *PEF Israel Endowment Fund, 317 Madison Ave., #607, New York, NY 10017 with a note that the funds are to be sent to Tzfat, Israel in care of "Lev V Neshama" (212)599-1260.*

Ilan Ramon, the first Israeli astronaut, who perished on the Columbia shuttle, sent out a call to Jews while he was in flight encircling the earth: Plant trees in Israel this year! You can now plant trees in his memory, *(800)542-TREE (8733) or http://www.jnf.org*

HEROINES

Molly Picon, Fanny Brice, Sophie Tucker, Barbra Streisand and Bette Midler are celebrated in a show, "Chutzpah! Jewish Women on Stage" created and performed by Liz Keever. Available to travel. *www.chutzpahwomen.info*

Sisters in Resistance, a documentary film directed by Maia Wechsler tells the story of four young non-Jewish women who risked their lives to fight Nazi brutality in Occupied France. Deported as political prisoners to Ravensbruck concentration camp, they helped each other survive, forming intense friendships which have lasted for more than 50 years. Airing nationally on PBS on April 29. Check local listings.

MAIA WECHSLER / WMM / ITVS

70 Up: New York Women in Their Prime is an exhibit of photos by Jessica Chornesky of famous and not so famous women includes their insights on aging. Through July 6 at the *Museum of the City of New York, (212)534-1672; www.mcny.org*

Kitty Carlisle Hart by Jessica Chornesky

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Once silent about domestic violence, the Jewish community is emergung as a global leader on the issue. The First International Conference on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community, July 20-22 in Baltimore, hopes to shape a movement that is Jewish in perspective and practice—and hopefully a model for other religious and ethnic communities—to end violence against women. *(800)343-2823; www.jwicalltoaction.org*

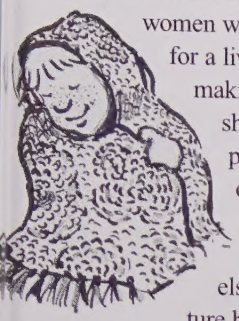
From Victim to Victor: A Retreat for the Healing and Empowerment of Jewish Women Who Have Been Physically, Emotionally or Sexually Abused will take place September 12-14, 2003 in Chicago. This program, created and led by Wendy Hilsen-Bernard and Rabbi Cindy Enger, can also be offered in your community. Contact the Seattle-based sponsoring organization, Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, *cenger@cpsdv.org; (206)634-1903.*

The Task Force on Family Violence 2003 Directory put out by UJA Federation includes a project to train "wise women" volunteers; a model for teaching anger management in schools; supports for the elderly; and programs to increase awareness of domestic violence in immigrant groups. *www.ujafedny.org*

GARMENT INDUSTRY

S. Klein's on the Square. For a study about the famous and late-lamented Manhattan pioneer discount retailer Sam Klein, the author would like to hear from anyone who knew and worked with him, shopped there—especially prior to his death in 1942—or even shoplifted at Klein's. *Andrea Siegel, Asiegel@gc.cuny.edu*

Knitting women's history. Jewish Russian and Polish immigrant women to the US in the years 1880 to 1920 knit in an odd blend of eastern and western styles. What did they



knit? Were there women who knit for a living, making shawls or piecework or socks or something else? Picture book author/ illustrator Michelle Edwards would be grateful for any details or memories, you can share. *(319)351-4666; 111988@msn.com*

WRITING

Jewish American Women Writers is the theme of a day long symposium, October 24, in Boca Raton, FL. There will be a panel on the fiction of Rebecca Goldstein, and Joyce Antler, Evelyn Avery, Sarah Blacher Cohen and Helene Meyers are some of scholars presenting on other subjects. This symposium, co-chaired by Annette Zilversmit and Janet Burstein, is a highlight of the sixth annual American Literature Association conference whose theme this year is Jewish American and Holocaust Literature. Contact *Gloria Cronin at gloriacronin@msn.com*

A new M.A. program in Creative Writing offered by the English Department at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan, Israel provides training for students of writing, working in English, who are drawn to Jewish or Israel-related material. An inaugural conference on Jewish Writing will be held in Israel in May 2003. Contact *Shaindy Rudoff srudoff@netvision.net.il; http://www.biu.ac.il/HU/en/home/index.html*

Eli, Eli: A Collection of Contemporary Tehines. Written by all types of Jews in whatever vernacular they speak, *tehines* are expressions of Jews' deep, personal and complicated relationships with God. Contribute your personal prayers, blessings and supplications by June 30 to editor *Naomi Bar-Yam, tehinabook@yahoo.com; http://necsi.org/projects/naomi/tehines/*

The Jewish Feminist Research Group is a forum for Jewish women scholars to present work in progress and receive feedback from scholars and interested lay people. Originally established by Ma'yan JFRG is now a project of the Jewish Women's Studies Program at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Contact *Gail Labovitz, jfrg@jtsa.edu; (212)280-6004.*

AdirChai Haberman-Browns. age 10

SCHOLARSHIP

Unmasking Gender and Power "Mistabra" in the Talmud means: through the process of engagement it will become clear. Mistabra Institute for Jewish Textual Activism, founded by Bonna Haberman, juxtaposes Biblical, Rabbinic, Hassidic and philosophic texts, integrating them with performance, art, literature, biography and technological media. Their provocative analyses of the weekly Torah reading propose related possibilities for personal and social change work. *Mistabra@brandeis.edu; ww.brandeis.edu/~mistabra*

—COMPILED BY NAOMI DANIS

HAGGADOT/TELLINGS

HaShoah Youth Fellowship Project encourages young people to preserve and perpetuate the history of the Holocaust through long-term relationships with Holocaust survivors. The program culminates with "fellows" speaking about their experiences in their schools, synagogues/churches. Holocaust survivors who can mentor are sought by the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston, *Mara Tencer, (617)457-8672 or mtencer@jcrcboston.org.*

Michele Kriegman's Adoption Haggadah uses the story of Moses as a paradigm—given away by his birth mother, who can not care for him, he is adopted and embarks on a long journey in which he rediscovers his birth people and liberates them. Mentioned in Lilith Winter 2000, you can find it on *http://ritualwell.org/Rituals/ritual.html?docid=949*

Haggadah for theYom Hashoah Seder Perhaps for events to be remembered in Jewish history they must be incorporated into rituals. Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day), Nissan 27, falls this year **on** April 29 This Hagaddah, includes testimony by survivors Helen Balsam, Carola Greenspan and Dora Prawer and a blessing for eating chametz because there were no matzot in Bergen Belsen on Passover 1944. "…we are prepared and ready to fulfill the mitzvah of "living by Torah, and not dying by it." The creator of this work in progress, Rabbi Avi Weiss, welcomes user/reader suggestions; *fax to (718)884-3206.* Haggadot $5 each from *the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale (201)928-1900.*

The Women's Passover Companion and The Women's Seder Sourcebook edited by Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld, Tara Mohr and Catherine Spector are two rich and useful compendiums that grew out of their work as organizers of Jewish Women at Yale. Contributors include scholars, writers, liturgists, students, artists, politicians and leaders, many familiar to Lilith readers, including editor-at-large Susan Schnur. $24.95 each volume. Jewish Lights, *www.jewishlights.com, (800)962-4544*

Luboml: My Heart Remembers. Archival film. photos and interviews with former residents portray daily life in the predominantly Jewish rural market town in pre-War Poland. Nazi actions in1941-42 destroyed 600 years of life in that community murdering nearly all 5,000 Jews living there. Produced by Eileen Douglas and Ron Steinman, 2002, *Cinema Guild (212)685-6242 info@cinemaguild.com*

Passover, in its springtime origins, was once a full-moon fertility holiday for species of every kind—as well as for the Earth Herself, with whose generativity and cycles women once had an intimate and empowering relationship. In the biblical Exodus story and in the Haggadah, however, fertility motifs survive as bare palimpsests of what they once ritually were, "birthing" having become largely metaphoric: the holy hydraulic process through which the ragtag Hebrews are "delivered" from Egypt and whooshed through parting seas to become, ultimately, a law-begotten people. "History" takes the place of "nature" in our received texts, and women's potent ritual connection to fecundity (of all kinds) becomes suppressed, lost, and then, sigh, altogether forgotten.

LILITH suggests, therefore, that during the part of the Seder when we dip parsley into salt water as a nod to nature's rebirth, someone at the table with x-y chromosomes rises, holds aloft an egg—that age-old symbol of generativity and spring—and descants both to it and to all of women's manifold fertilities.

Ode to the Passover Egg:

There is nothing more private than you, **Egg.** You are pure secret, unbosoming not a thing. Who would guess that inside your smooth temple worlds queue up, chafing to be born through generations, to be birthed and birthed again? Who would guess that worlds queue up inside of me, too, **Egg**, for I am *like* you — inside, the life in me teems, unborn universes mutely jostling and pulsing; like you, **Egg**, I am pregnant with what might-be. ● On the outside, **Egg,** you are flawless — dumb Eden before the fall. But inside, in that wild oestrus un-eden place, you realize your prurient aptitude for Creation. ● In our hands, **Egg**, you have been a fragile womb. How absently we have dropped you, how readily broken our dreams, passed over our own disciplines and desires. How we fail to bring waiting worlds to birth! carrying you as on a spoon across our hearts' lawn, cautiously, back and forth, back and forth, we ferry fevered plans, failing in execution. ● In the cove of my hand, **Egg**, I hear you whisper: "It is all within. It is all within." And I bend and whisper back: "Then let me in!" "No," you shout. "Be strong. Enter who *you* are, enter your own body. There you will find a fruitful place. Don't go off somewhere else! Don't wander forty years in a desert! Think about this carefully: Consider this hand that cradles me — *it is yours.* This palm in which I wait, winking: It is all within. It is all within. Acknowledge me," you tell me, **Egg**, "birth me. Birth your worlds."

RABBI SUSAN SCHNUR

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